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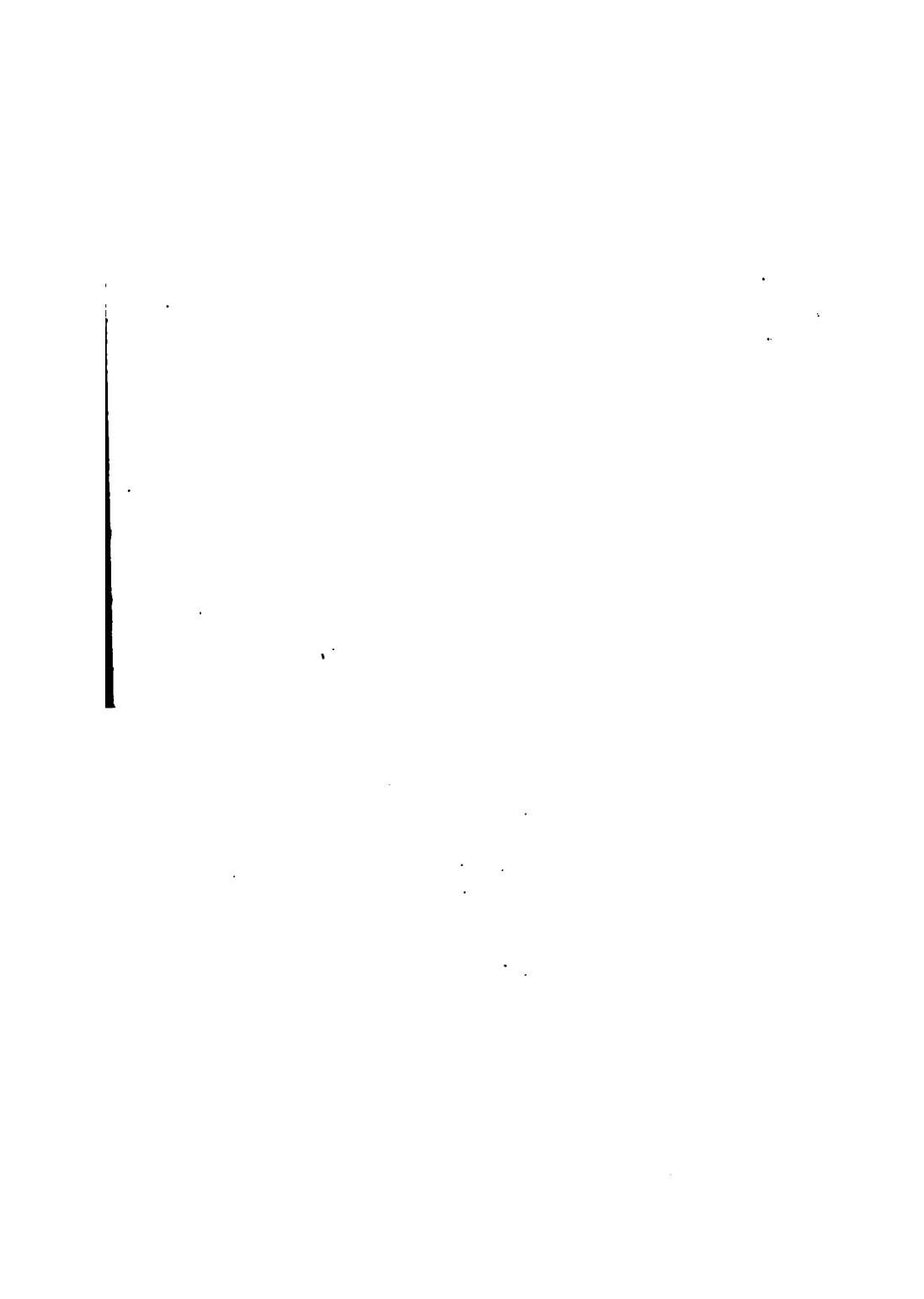
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JOAN
MERRYWEATHER

AND
OTHER STORIES



JOAN MERRYWEATHER

AND OTHER TALES.

BY

KATHERINE SAUNDERS,

AUTHOR OF "GIDEON'S ROCK," "THE HIGH MILLS," ETC.



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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. JOAN MERRYWEATHER	1
II. THE HAUNTED CRUST	169
III. THE FLOWER GIRL	221
IV. THE WATCHMAN'S STORY	235
V. AN OLD LETTER	267



JOAN MERRYWEATHER.



JOAN MERRYWEATHER.

THE hubbub of the fair was at its height. The smoke of innumerable fires crept up lazily towards the blue September sky. The fields outlying the noisy impromptu city were strewn with prostrate beasts of burden, sweltering under the burning sun. Children moaned in their sleep under the vans and carts, or drank incessantly from buckets of tepid water brought for the horses from the little river Cam.

"Come, come, Master Barber, keep up your spirits! there's corn in Egypt, and golden locks in Sturbridge fair, take your oath on't. Why, see, here comes a bevy of hussies now."

"Yes, with polls as brown as my coat, and I tell you my order is for the palest flaxen shade."

It was a smart mercer, standing at the open side of his booth, who had thus addressed a young man leaning idly against some bales of goods.

Suddenly the young man started.

"Eh, what now?" asked the mercer.

"By the mass!" said the young man, "'tis the very colour, the very shade. Ah, if I could get that head of hair, Mister Mercer, I should not have come all the way from Lancashire for nothing, even if my mysterious friend at Harwich should fail to turn up on the 17th. Who is that girl, Mister Mercer? Do you know her? Is she poor? Have I, think you, any chance? Flourish your ribbons, man! make her come this way."

"Gently, gently, my friend," said the mercer, laughing. "'Tis Joan Merryweather, the spinner. She is coming, trust her; she's been cheapening my kerchiefs for the last three days. Last night she left me to consider if I would not take a sixpence off that black and white."

"Then she *is* poor?" said the young man eagerly.

"Or stingy! stingy as a miser," returned his companion. "But hush! here she is, and you can judge for yourself."

The mercer spread out his wares temptingly. The young barber leaned in a careless attitude against the

bales, pulled his three-cornered hat over his eyes, and watched with a shrewd and curious look the approach of the person whose hair had so pleased him.

First of all he saw a pair of feet, stepping with an air of modest dignity and self-possession. As the feet, advancing at a slow, even pace, brought her nearer, the barber's quick eye took in both face and figure at a glance.

She was of middle height, and was dressed in a dark mourning gown, made low on the shoulders, which were covered with a snowy muslin neckerchief, pinned at the throat. Her face was small, with low square brows projecting rather sharply over a pair of eyes of vivid blue, which seemed at once to fascinate and repel the gallants of the fair. Her dull complexion spoke of close labour at her spinning-wheel, and was enhanced by the pale ethereal brightness of the rim of hair just visible under the plain black silk hat, with its sharp brim and filled-in crown. Her lips were red as the hedge-berries, but were compressed with an air of sullen reserve.

Such was Joan Merryweather, as the young barber of

Lancashire first saw her on the 25th of September many years ago, when Sturbridge fair was in its glory, and when he had come hither with forty pounds in his pocket to buy hair for the fashionable wig-makers of Liverpool.

His name, Humphrey Arkdale, was already famous in his own county as that of a man wonderfully expert in obtaining the tresses of the Lancashire maidens at the statute and other fairs.

He watched Joan Merryweather closely, as she paused before the mercer's booth.

She stood within a few inches of Humphrey Arkdale, whom she did not see, and stooping, took the edge of one of the neckerchiefs between her finger and thumb, and felt its texture.

The mercer approached.

“Well?” said the girl, inquiringly.

“Nay, mistress; such a price was never heard of,” asserted the mercer, pulling a long face, and winking at the barber. “I tell you it would ruin me to take a penny less.”

She dropped the neckerchief quickly, folded her arms, looked at it, and sighed.

At this moment the young man, whom she had not yet perceived, bent towards her, and said, with a smile,—

“If you will forgive a stranger, I think that kerchief would become you vastly. I would be glad to share the cost, only to prove my words.”

The clear cold eyes looked up straight into Humphrey Arkdale’s, with a quick glance of surprise and contempt.

The next instant, Joan Merryweather had turned her back on the mercer’s booth, and was walking quickly away.

The young barber nodded to his friend, smiled confidently in answer to his shake of the head, and followed her.

He was soon close behind those dazzling plaits of hair he so much coveted.

Just as she was entering the oyster market, there came a great rush of people, some running to get out of the way, and others shouting and huzzaing.

Looking on over their heads, Arkdale saw it was the

Merry Andrew in his coach and six, and with his servants, in grand liveries; and it being the first time he had seen this grand personage—the most notorious of the medical quacks of the time—he could do nothing but stand still, and stare till he had passed.

It was not until he saw the kind of train that followed, which consisted of the very dregs of the fair, that he wondered where Joan Merryweather had gone to escape being knocked down by the rushing crowd.

Then he saw her standing, pale and distressed, before a couple of collegians, who had barred her way.

Arkdale hurried to the spot shouting—

“Have a care, sirs,—’tis my sister!”

He took the trembling arm, and drew it through his; and the young gentlemen, seeing both had an air of respectability, judged it best, after a few tipsy oaths, to take themselves off.

Joan immediately withdrew her arm, but allowed her protector to walk by her side till they were out of the market.

Then they went across a stubble field, and came close to



the little gate that opened on a fair meadow, watered by the river Cam.

A hundred years, let us observe, have wrought many changes in the locality.

Over that meadow then gleamed a white path that led to the ferry. Across the river could be seen the church spire and homely house-roofs of the rural village of Chesterton, at some little distance from which, along the line of the river, Joan Merryweather was born, and where she had lived all her days.

It was not until they had reached the little gate opening on the meadow that Arkdale spoke.

"Can you forgive me for calling you by the name I did, in the necessity of the moment?"

Joan hesitated an instant, with her hand on the gate.

"I can, sir," she replied, looking up with the nearest approach to a smile he had yet seen in her face, "and thank you kindly, too."

Arkdale smiled, and was following her through the gate, but she held it close, and with a bright decided glance and a curtsey said, continuing her former sentence,—

"And at the same time wish you a civil good day."

"Nay," protested Arkdale, laughingly, "sure I may see you to the ferry, Mistress Joan?"

"Since," answered she, "you have my name so ready, let me beg you to respect it, and not give it a handle for gossips to take hold on by being seen walking with me. So once more take a 'Thank you,' and good-bye."

"But why fear gossips?" asked Arkdale, leaning with both arms on the gate, in an attitude to detain her. "You have a husband, sure, or father, or brother, to take care of your name?"

"I have nothing, and no one. So, as my bread depends on my good name, and as a lone woman's name is fair or foul as her neighbours choose to make it, I do fear gossips. Again, sir, good night."

"But, indeed, I heard—pardon me just one moment—indeed I heard that you had a father living."

As Joan stood, turning half away from him, Arkdale saw her long brown eyelashes sweep suddenly down her cheek, and the shoulder that was turned towards him heaved.

"I have a father," she answered, in a tone of mingled

softness and bitterness; "but he might be in heaven for the hope I have of ever seeing him again."

"Is he beyond the seas, might I ask?"

"Ay, at Philadelphia."

"And why not join him there, since you have no tie at home?"

"Sir," said Joan, "I am a spinner, and my wage is about four shillings and sixpence a week."

"But have you no treasures you might part with for the sum wanted for such a journey?"

"Had I such treasures I should not be here now. I am a lodger in the little farm that was my father's; I sold my earrings to bury my mother whom I have just lost. But I think you have asked questions enough for a stranger, and I have answered too many."

"Do but give me leave to walk with you to the ferry," said Arkdale, "and I will prove to you I have not asked these questions idly."

She stood still and made no sign of willingness for him to open the gate.

"If you will pardon my saying it," he continued, "I

would venture to remind you you have yet a treasure that might be turned into money for the purpose of your voyage."

"Pray what is that?" asked Joan.

"First," said Arkdale, "will you let me tell you a little story?"

"I don't know," answered Joan; "we have supper at seven, and 'tis now past six. I should be home to fry Farmer Bristow's bacon."

"'Tis a very short story," said Arkdale. "Only this: You must know there was a noble lady who married a poor gentleman—for love, of course."

"Ay, there had need have been plenty of that, since there was no money," retorted Joan, with a sigh. "Well?"

"Well, and then, when all was fixed on, what must both do but want to give a farewell dinner to his friends? But if there was money for the journey there was none for the dinner. Now the lady provided the money, and how do you think she got it?"

"Nay, how should I know what the quality do in such straits?" answered Joan, carelessly.

"What Joan Merryweather can do in her strait, if she pleases. But perhaps her wish to join her father is not so strong as was the Countess of Suffolk's to please her husband."

"I know nothing I can do. I work for my bread from sunrise o' Monday to Saturday midnight. Well, how did your countess get the money?"

"She had hair like yours, sweet Mistress Joan, and she sold it for twenty pounds."

Arkdale leaned his chin in his hand as he hung over the gate, and watched her narrowly.

At first she stepped back and gave him an indignant glance. Then a look of sadness and of thought came into her eyes, and she gazed over the meadow with her arms folded before her, as her habit was often to fold them—perhaps because of their aching with the monotonous labour of the spinning-wheel.

Soon she looked again at Arkdale, who gave her the opportunity of judging all she could of his honesty from his appearance, by turning away his eyes and letting her look as long and searchingly as she pleased.

The result of her scrutiny proved more flattering to his vanity than favourable to his business, for Joan turned upon him all of a sudden with a burst of anger, and Arkdale could not but see this was through some natural mortification at finding that the attentions of the pertinacious stranger were not, after all, aimed at herself, but called forth as a mere matter of business.

"So this is your trade, sir?" she said, sharply; "this is what your fine speeches and your brave swaggering was to do for you! I make no doubt, sir, those gentlemen that stopped me were friends of yours, and had learnt their lesson of you."

Arkdale saw plainly enough the working of her mind, and was sure she must know her last insinuation to be absurdly untrue. He was a little surprised, however, when he saw her walk away with a quick, impetuous step; and love of business suddenly getting the better of his vanity, he called after her,—

"I offer you twelve pounds for all, to be cut even with the ears."

She walked on, showing no sign of having heard.

Arkdale slipped through the little gate, and followed her, stepping not on the path where she walked, but swiftly and noiselessly along the grass.

He reached the water's edge a moment after she had reached it. The ferry-boat was hauled in on the opposite side of the river, and the ferryman was asleep under a tree close by it.

Joan called to him in a clear ringing voice.

He did not hear her, but slept on.

Joan did not immediately call again, but stood by the margin of the river, looking down upon the ground, and musing.

By-and-by, Arkdale, standing close behind her, saw her little hand, with its long, nimble fingers, steal slowly round her neck, and touch those exquisite coils of hair. The white neckerchief, and the sprig of rosemary she wore in memory of her dead mother, were lifted with a sigh. Then her foot, with the tip of its homely shoe, began to trace something in the soft ground.

Arkdale stole nearer, looked down, and saw a rude 12 inscribed.

"Make it fifteen," he said, gently.

Joan started, but did not look round.

Arkdale, with his stick, rubbed out the twelve, and wrote the fifteen in its place, and they both stood looking at it silently.

At length Joan shaded her eyes with her hand, and in a voice less sharp and clear than before, called,—

"Ferryman!"

The ferryman heard something, and thinking it was the cry of the moor-hen seeking her nest in the fen skirting the river, considered he had slept past his supper-hour. He tumbled up to a sitting posture, with his back to the river, and began with his clasp knife on a lump of bread, his dog sitting by and watching him.

"Shall I call him, Mistress Joan?" asked Arkdale.

Joan turned and looked at him, with a tear in each eye.

"You shall have it for the fifteen," said she.

Arkdale was silent. He told himself he was hiding his triumph.

"You will wish to see the length?" asked Joan.

"Before coming to any bargain—that—that will be necessary."

"And bargains are best made before witnesses?"

"That's as you please," said Arkdale.

"Then you'd better, perhaps, come home with me."

"You know best about that, and what will be thought about it amongst your friends."

"Nay, I have no friends; only honest folk in the house, who would not see me unfairly dealt by. Ferryman!"

"Ferryman!" shouted Arkdale, in a voice that woke a distant echo.

The dog looked round and barked at them for interrupting his master's meal; the old ferryman leisurely wiped his clasp knife, and wrapped his bread up; then got into the boat, pushed off, and, with his heavy pole, soon brought it to the other side of the river.

"Now, sir," cried a surly, cracked voice, "my time's my life; look sharp, and help your sweetheart in."

Arkdale smiled, and held out his hand; Joan smiled, and took it daintily, showing a little brief colour in her cheek.

When she had sat down, Arkdale stepped in, and took a seat facing her.

"Look here, mistress," said the ferryman; "I'll set you down close at your place for a penny more, as I'm going home."

"Then do," answered Joan; so the boat was turned, and the old man pushed against the current.

Joan was silent, and appeared thoughtful. In a little while she said to Arkdale, taking off her hat,—

"'Tis great folly if I have the fuss and ado of taking you into the house, and then you are not satisfied."

"I know what there is in those plaits. I fancy I could guess the weight," said Arkdale, with a smile.

"At least you shall see now; and then you cannot say you were deceived," said Joan, coolly, after a glance round the banks.

She took out the pins, and undid the plaits in the space of a minute, combed her hair out loosely with her fingers, shook it forwards, and looked gravely at Arkdale for an opinion.

Her eyes dropped again quickly, for the look she met

was not merely the look of a man who perceived he had made a good bargain.

If a mermaid had risen from the water, put Joan Merryweather from her place, and sat and smiled before him, the young man could scarcely have gazed on her with more amazement.

Joan's hair, silky, yellow, rippling, and long enough to touch with its pale golden waves the river's silver ones, was indeed her glory. The letting of it down about her was like the sudden shining of the sun upon a landscape, the glimmer of the moon on grey waters.

The modest consciousness of its beauty gave a new aspect to her face. Its self-reliant, stern, business-like air vanished ; its sternness became softness, the eyes glowed with deeper colour, the dull cheeks brightened to faint rose tints, the lips relaxed and became rounder, the whole face was seized with the sweet weakness and confusion of beauty, which made it nearly as charming as beauty itself.

It was the fairest of September evenings ; the dew fell, and all nature, weary and athirst, steeped her lips in it,

and drank with a silent and a deep joy, which was shown in every trembling leaf, and reed, and blade of grass.

Arkdale gazed at her in the greatest wonder, but Joan knew he was not looking only at her hair.

Sometimes the hubbub of the fair came in a faint sound over the fields, like the noise of the old world, which it seemed to Arkdale they had left behind.

The old ferrymen made grimaces at his dog, to see the young fellow so absorbed. In truth, Arkdale at times forgot by what means he was being carried along. It often seemed to him to be the pale gleam of Joan's exquisite hair, and the sweet smell of the sprig of rosemary in her bosom, that, like a charm, drew him on and on, whither, he scarce remembered, or cared to know.

To break the spell, Joan lifted her hand as if to put the hair back again, and said,—

“Well, will it be your money's worth?”

Arkdale started.

“One minute,” he said, catching at her wrist, and drawing it gently down, “I am making a reckoning.”

The old ferryman looked at his dog and grinned.

Joan saw not how she could object, so submitted; and as Arkdale forgot to let go the hand, there was a look on Joan's part intended to be severe, but its severity got lost on the way, and so it was only a glance of inquiry or reminder, to which Arkdale's handsome eyes replied with most profound apologies.

Joan locked her fingers lightly over her knees, and looked down sideways into the water.

But for those hands, which bore the marks of honest labour, Arkdale could have half fancied himself being spirited away by this fair-haired maiden, beyond the borders of this every-day bargaining world.

On went the little boat, the sunset colours glowing above and beneath it, a swarm of merry gnats pursuing it, and an enlarged picture of itself and its silent crew floating with it on the side where Joan's eyes fell.

Arkdale was not a superstitious man, but there was something alike weird and bewitching in thus gliding, with the gentlest rocking motion, along the river whose every turn was fresh to him, and Joan in the midst, with her

wonderful hair, the fair, white neckerchief about her shoulders, and a shy consciousness in her eyes, which made her look sweeter and more comely than any woman he had ever seen.

He knew he should never forget this face. He felt that its image was being fixed indelibly in his memory, by no choice of his own.

When the boat touched land at the foot of one of her home fields, Joan grew suddenly calm, alert, and business-like. She gathered up her hair with a rapidity that amazed the barber, put on her hat, and drew forth her little bag to pay the ferryman, whom she rated soundly for demanding an extra halfpenny on account of Arkdale's weight.

With a strange perversity, now that the hair had ceased to dazzle him, Arkdale began to feel a lively satisfaction in his bargain, and followed Joan up the turnip field with a buoyant step and smile.

The field and a little lane passed, they came upon the very quaintest little corner Arkdale had ever seen in his life.

It was formed of four or five ancient cottages, standing

some considerable distance from the village, with crossings and squares of wood on their fronts, crumbling chimneys, and creaking latticed windows, half unhinged. They were arranged as if to form the corners of a court, and were propped and strengthened in several places with pieces of wood reaching from one house to another, but the very nails of these supporting beams were rotting with rust, and slipping from their holes.

Each house had a door opening into a low-roofed stone passage, at the other end of which appeared a flowery, weedy wilderness, bathed in yellow light.

Joan looked into each passage, and nodded; and each person she nodded to came out to look after her, and the supposed sweetheart she had brought home from the fair.

In one passage, a pale, dumb boy was making mats; for him Joan had a fairing in her pocket. In another sat a dame, who looked as ancient as the arch over her, with her staff in one hand, and her ale jug on her knee. For her Joan had nothing, which omission she seemed to know would be resented, for she quickened her steps, when the old lady's staff was heard thumping the stones behind

them with feeble haste, and soon a cracked voice called after them—

“Ay, ay, Madam Joan, so you’ve got one at last, have you? Save us! only to think on’t! He—he—he! ‘Tis a brave lad to take what none else will. What say you, neighbour! He must ha’ lodged a long way out o’ hearing of our pretty Joan’s tongue to take up wi’ her. What say ye, Gaffer Grump?”

Joan stopped, and turned round; her chest heaving, her hand clenched, her eyes a-blaze.

“ ‘Tis time the worms had *your* tongue, to draw the sting out of it!” said she. “But shall I answer you? No, wicked old scandal-monger! you are half dust a’ready, and an honest woman’s breath might blow you to the churchyard.”

Quite pale with passion, Joan again led the way, till they came to a doorway older and more curious than the rest.

“Now,” said she, turning sharply; “here is where I live. Come in and get this business over quickly, and get out of this nest of scandal-mongers for your own sake and for mine. I saw Farmer Bristow and his two sons a-field,

so there is but the old grandmother at home, and she takes note of nothing but victuals and drink. Ah me!" and Joan gave such a sigh over her friendless state as went to Arkdale's very soul.

The door opened right into the kitchen, or house-place, as Joan called it. There was a latticed window at the farther end, low and wide, looking on a weedy orchard, brilliant with September colours, red-cheeked apples, and yellow pears.

Joan motioned her guest to go and sit down on the broad window-seat, which he did, and looked about him.

There was the old chimney, with its seats, and the round pot or crock of iron boiling on the hook. There were trusses of hay and straw packed against the wall, and old saddles hanging on the back of the settle. There was Joan's spinning-wheel in one corner, and a rush-bottomed chair with her supper-plate in it, and a cup of brown ale.

This last Joan carried at once to Arkdale. He hesitated about taking it, but she looked so proud and repellent that he durst not venture to refuse it, lest she should see he guessed she would have to go without herself for her

hospitality. So he accepted it gallantly, with the kindest of smiles and thanks, which, like sunshine on frost, melted something in Joan's cold eyes.

"Sweet Mistress Joan," said he, as he gave her back the cup, "you are unhappy that I have persuaded you to this business."

"Nay," answered Joan, with a short sob, "'tis the thought of seeing my father, and of being once more with friends as kind-mannered as yourself."

She went and hung up her hat, and then whispered to a bundle of clothes Arkdale had not observed before, crouched by the fire.

Soon he heard a voice proceed from it, in answer to Joan.

"Ay, to be sure, wench, an' a good thing too. Where's the use of a woman's hair? your own mother's sister's daughter did the like. Wait, I'll get a sheet to put about ye."

She unlocked the seat of her settle, and took out one of her fine linen sheets laid up with lavender.

Joan seated herself on a three-legged stool before the window, and the old woman came and put the sheet about

her shoulders, and then, after glancing carelessly out of her yellow cap-frills at Arkdale, shuffled back to her ale-soppet at the fire.

Joan let down her hair. Arkdale rose, took from his pocket a pair of scissors, long and broad in the blades, rubbed them on his coat-sleeve, and approached her.

He laid his hands on her head with a strange timidity of touch for one who had so often done the same kind of thing before, then took them off again.

Joan was conscious of his hesitation, and could not keep the sheet from fluttering.

"Mistress Merryweather," said Arkdale, in a low voice, "it seems to me that I have lost my love for this bargain."

Joan flushed, and then grew white. Did he mean the hair was not so good as he had thought?

She lifted her eyes to his face, as he sat on the window-seat close before her with an end of her hair in his hand against his lips, and found his eyes looking at her as no eyes ever looked at her before.

She looked down on the stone floor again, and there came a colour on her face that made it wonderfully fair.

"Sir," said she, in a trembling voice, "I see you think this an unwomanly thing for me to do—this selling of my hair for money—and would stop me from it, even to your own loss? You are good; you are very good for a stranger," and the tears ran down her face.

"Unwomanly!" said Arkdale; "nay, mistress, I think it shows a heart so leal and loving, and free from vanity, that—"

"Then," interrupted Joan, trying to smile, "have the hair off, sir, if you please."

He rose and took it in his hand again, and drew the points of the scissors along where he should sever it.

Joan held her breath.

He drew the points along several times, but did not cut yet.

He laid the scissors down on the window-seat, and Joan saw him standing before her, and smiling down upon her with a strange look of determination in his face.

In her surprise she half rose from her stool, her lips apart, her eyes fixed on his.

Arkdale took her finger-tips timidly.



"Joan," said he, in a rich and gentle voice, "you must know I *am* a little of an adventurer; and am used to doing business by bold strokes, and thereby bringing to myself great damage or great good. I believe the bargain we struck together to have been a good and fair one o' both sides. But now, after considering, like a careful purchaser, I have it in my mind to make a different kind of proposal to you. In fact, I see that the hair and face together would be of infinitely greater value to me than the hair alone, though it fetched me a fortune. Sweetheart, you have seen as much of me as I of you; and I have seen enough of you to know you for a dear and sweet and good woman, whom I could love truly and fondly all my days. Joan, will you prove your gossips' words true? Will you come away with me, and be my wife?"

While Joan Merryweather sat quite overpowered by the courage and suddenness of her new friend, the door opened.

Farmer Bristow and his sons had returned.

The sight of Joan in her sheet, with her hair about her, and of the handsome young man holding her hand, caused

them considerable astonishment. The six clayey feet, three bristling chins, and three shouldered pitchforks, all made a pause at the door, and looked very terrible.

Joan lost her calmness entirely. Arkdale, never behind-hand at seeing and grasping at any incident likely to advance his own business, pressed Joan's hand reassuringly, and went to meet the farmer with a modest and respectful, but courageous demeanour.

"I ask pardon, farmer," said he, "for being here without your leave, but I have been waiting to see you. Joan and myself have decided we will no longer keep our courtship a secret from you. We want only your consent for the banns to be put up next Sunday to make us both happy. I am a barber by trade; I have a small—I should, perhaps, say a *very* small—but flourishing business at Bolton, in Lancashire. When you came in I was showing my sweetheart the new town fashions of dressing the hair."

The old farmer lowered his pitchfork and glared at his guest, looking neither pleased nor satisfied with his eloquent introduction of himself.

"Barber!" growled he, surveying Arkdale's graceful

form and rather sarcastic eyes scowlingly; "thee's no barber! it's more loike 'ee's one o' they 'varsity whipper-snappers. At any rate, I'll ha' none o' thee. Get out! D'y'e hear? Don't they understand English at thy 'varsity? Get out!"

"Sir," answered Arkdale, with perfect good-humour, "since the only drawback to our better acquaintance appears to be a doubt on your part as to the truth of what I have said respecting my trade, allow me to remind you that you can prove that to your entire satisfaction in the space of a few minutes. You have a week's beard on your chin; would you like a shave? Do, 'tis mighty refreshing."

The farmer, who, during Arkdale's speech, had dropped his pitchfork and seated himself on the bench, was too much amazed by the young man's question to utter a word. His consternation was increased by the sight of the razors and soap-balls, which were produced, as if by magic, from Arkdale's pockets, and by the cool, easy grace with which his guest possessed himself of some water from the pot over the fire.

"My character," said Arkdale, while preparing the lather, "I think I may flatter myself, stands as high as most men's for honesty, industry, and perseverance. Allow me!"

And the poor old farmer was seized by the nose, and gagged by a dab of lather, before he could speak or move to help himself.

The two sons stood with mouths agape, staring from one to the other.

Arkdale lathered away coolly, and went on recommending himself to Joan's guardian.

"I never," said he, "allow a good chance to slip through my fingers for want of a little enterprise. I have some valuable trade secrets. I hope one day to be a rich man. At all events, Joan shall not want. She, too, is industrious. I think we are admirably suited to each other."

The farmer, unable to move a hair's breadth for fear of the razor, fixed his round eyes on him with a look of stolid wonder and wrath.

No shaving brushes were used in those days, and it was a custom of the barbers to vie with each other in the

dexterity with which they flung the lather from their fingers to a distance. Arkdale performed this feat with remarkable grace.

A look of admiration began to blend itself with the blank amazement in the eyes of the spectators.

The face shaved, and the farmer's rough locks reduced to order by Arkdale's ready comb, and sprinkled with sweet water, Arkdale took up the farmer's old hat, and, according to the rules of his trade, presented it to him with a deep bow and the words—

“Your humble servant, sir!”

The interest of the bystanders was now centred in the farmer himself.

John and Luke Bristow were especially curious to see how their father would reply to the strange attack that had been made upon him.

Left to himself the farmer looked not unlike an old crow who had been caught in a child's trap and set free again, and who begins to perceive its freedom by slow degrees, and to lift its crushed feathers. He moved first one shoulder, then the other, then swelled, grunted, fixed his

eyes vindictively on Arkdale, rose, drew his hand across his smooth chin, and paused.

Arkdale had taken his hat, and, modestly turning his back on the supper table, had seated himself on a sack of oats close to the open door.

"By the mass, farmer!" cried he, as the farmer stood glowering at him, "'tis well worth a journey from the north to see such land as this. That's something like wheat yonder, that is; and a turnip-field here *is* a turnip-field. Now, that one running up from the water's edge to this lane is a sight for sore eyes. Belongs to a neighbour of yours, they tell me."

"Then they toll 'ee a dormed lie, moy foyne younker," growled the farmer. "'Tis no mon's aloyve but moyne."

"Sure, now," said Arkdale. "Well, 'tis a pretty field. And those are rare fine grunters yonder. You Cambridgeshire farmers ought to come and give us northerners a lesson or two. Joan, lass, bear in mind I am intruding. As soon as thou'rt at liberty I'll wish thee good-bye."

At this appeal the farmer turned his eyes slowly from

Arkdale to Joan, who was dishing up the hissing bacon and eggs. After looking at her flushed face for some time, he went to his chair at the table, again stroked his chin, and said to Arkdale gruffly—

“Woll, younker, if ‘ee thinks so woll o’ the bacon ‘ee’d better stay and taste un.”

“Nay, farmer!” answered he, “I never intended to intrude. ’Twas but to see you about Joan. I’ll wish you a good evening.”

The farmer broke out with a hoarse laugh.

“Why, dorm me, lad,” cried he, thumping the table, “can ‘ee arst for a sweetheart and pull a mon by the noyse as soon as look at un, and woll ‘ee turn shame-faced o’er a bit o’ vittles? Clap thee down; there’s no great harm i’ thee; thee knows a good turnip-field when thee sees un. Come, clap thee down. I arst thy pardon for callin’ thee a ‘varsity chap, if ‘tis that sticks i’ thy gizzard.”

Arkdale smiled and approached the table, glancing rather anxiously at Joan as he did so.

He could plainly see she was not too well pleased at her consent having been thus boldly taken for granted, and

began to fear he had shaved the farmer gratis in more respects than one.

The two young men hung up their pitchforks, seated themselves on a bench at the table, and grinned at one another till the farmer filled their plates.

Joan waited on them in sullen silence, then retired to her own cold supper in the corner. The farmer, however, called her back, made her sit on the same bench with Arkdale, and piled up her plate with a lavish hand.

Arkdale made many attempts to get up a conversation. He chatted about the fair and the harvest, but was soon compelled to hold his tongue, for neither Farmer Bristow nor his sons had any idea of eating and talking at the same time.

If he ventured a remark to one of the sons, the youth addressed would stand his knife and fork on end, stare at him for some seconds, and bawl out—"Eh?" And when Arkdale had repeated his observation, the young man would gaze on him, as if wondering what on earth there was in such a remark important enough to warrant a sus-

pension of the business of eating, and then bend over his plate again with a grunt.

Joan sat quite silent, and whether Arkdale sighed or touched her sleeve, would not give him a single look.

They had sat in this way for nearly an hour, when the farmer, having taken off the edge of his appetite, began to regard Joan and her wooer with a grim satisfaction.

"So thee's got a sweetheart, Joan?" said he, in his blandest tones, which were gruff enough to make Arkdale start again.

Joan flushed, and bent over her plate, pretending to be very busy, but all the time never lifting her fork to her mouth.

"Woll," exclaimed the farmer, "whoy don't 'ee eat? I see nought about the chap to set thee again thy supper. He's as loike me, when I was a younker, as two peas in a pod; and sharp in's trade. Dorm me, I thought 'twas Bedlam brok' loose. Haw, haw! But that worn't bad to take a mon boy the noyse whoile he had his say. If his temper's as easy as his razor and his tongue, he'll be no motch for thee, Joan, when thee's in thy tantrums."



Arkdale laughed, and bent down to look in Joan's face.
Joan was crying.

The farmer saw it and growled—

"Dorm the women! they're none happy without they're pulling a con-trary way. Whoy, Joan, if I'd said to 'ee, 'Thee shon't have this younker, dorm me if thee shall,' thee'd be round his neck in no toime; but I loikes the lad, and gives him his ballyful, and says to 'ee, thee shall have a flitch, and a hom, and yon stringin' o' onions, and a pair o' table clouts and sheets o' thy own mother's spinnin', thee sets an' pipes thy eye and picks thy food loike a cow sick o' the measles—thee that can polish thy platter with e'er a one!"

The sons roused a little and stared as they heard this mention of Joan's dowry.

Joan herself did not appear much elated. She sat quiet during the rest of the meal, and wore a sad and sullen air, which the farmer marked with increasing displeasure.

When she rose, and Arkdale with her, the bench got up set. Then the farmer broke out—

"What!" snarled he, "in thy tantrums again! Ain't

that enough for 'ee? Did thee think I ought to give thee more?"

Joan turned round on him with wet and flashing eyes.

"Luke Bristow," said she, in a high-pitched, bitter voice, "when you used to labour for your day's wage in my father's fields, you were always kind to me; and now, when you are master of all, you are kind to me—most kind—in giving me these things. I never thought of your giving me aught. The linen I'd go down on my knees to thank you for, because her hands made it; but never blame me, Luke Bristow! never blame me for not laughing and being glad and blithe to think I may go out of this place where I was born—where I love every stone I tread on; to think I may go, and not a soul care where I go, or who I go with."

Her face fell in her hands, and she sobbed.

"Nay," she said, still more bitterly, "the first that asks may have, be he bad or good. The first roving jackanapes that comes by has but to whistle, and 'tis 'Run, Joan, and be glad o' thy luck!' What matters it neighbours know

nought of him? He is good enough for Joan. Who is not?"

"Mistress Merryweather," said Arkdale hotly, "when I spoke to you we were on equal footing one with another—I knew no more of you than you of me."

"Well, there is equal footing no longer," answered Joan shortly. "You have heard nothing about me but what is bad, and I have seen in you——. Well, 'tis no matter."

She walked past him, and sat down by her wheel.

"Thot's a dormed sort o' courtin'!" observed the farmer; "but don't thee moind her, lad. Thee had better boide here to-night; thee's welcome, if 'ee can loy o' the loft there wi' Jack an' Luke. Thee can ha' some fresh hoy, but thee must help thyself."

That was certainly necessary, for the two youths had no sooner finished their supper, than they divested themselves of their smockfrocks and boots, and giving Arkdale a sleepy nod, mounted the ladder that led to a loft, with one side all open to the room, and in a few moments began to snore, though it was but just half-past eight in the evening.

Arkdale soon perceived that the farmer was only waiting up in politeness to him—a fact of which Bristow took care to remind him occasionally by a tremendous yawn:

For a long time Arkdale took no notice of his host's warnings, which continued to increase in length and loudness. He felt irresolute and ruffled in temper.

Joan took the shaking old grandmother upstairs, and, coming down again, placed a rushlight on a chair beside her spinning-wheel, and went busily to work.

"Woll, Muster Barber," said the farmer at last, "Joan's got to make up for her day's gladdin', but thee and me 'ud better get to bed. I'll see thee up the ladder 'fore I go, by thy leave."

That was all very well, Arkdale thought, but the question was, should he decline being seen up the ladder? Had he not better retreat while there was yet time?

Joan was not an angel, that was pretty evident. Had he not been a little too bold in this day's business? Hadn't he better hurry off to Harwich, forget this day's work, and try to find Daniel Sterne, who might be now looking for him?

The farmer rose, and so did Arkdale.

The farmer waited. Arkdale picked up his stick, and walked to the middle of the room.

Then he paused. On one side of him was the ladder—on the other was the door, showing a fair night and a harvest moon. Which should he choose?

He advanced to the ladder.

"Mistress Merryweather, I wish you good-night," said he, and said it rather coolly, for he had not yet forgotten the "roving jackanapes."

Joan nodded stiffly.

Arkdale would now have mounted the ladder, but Farmer Bristow stood at the foot of it, barring his way, and staring at him with a peculiar look in his small round eyes.

Arkdale returned his look inquiringly.

"Woll?" said the farmer menacingly.

"Sir?" said Arkdale.

"I don't understand thy new-fangled courtin'," observed Bristow, in a low voice; "but I toll 'ee this moch, young mon—I'll have no donderin' wi' Joan, no dormed willin'

and wontin'. If she's thy sweetheart, as thee says she is, whoy don't 'ee go and give her a kiss ? "

Arkdale paused a minute, then went over to Joan's corner. He laid one hand on her wheel, and the other on the back of her chair.

Joan looked up, and she saw he no more intended to give her a kiss than she intended to receive one.

"Mistress Merryweather," said he, in a voice too low for the farmer to hear, "I am going back to the fair betimes in the morning. If I am up before the others, will you speak with me ? "

Joan bowed her head gravely.

Arkdale would then have left her, but that he knew Farmer Bristow was watching him, and had seen he had not yet obeyed his instructions. It was an awkward position for him, and Joan knew it was. She glanced up at him a little maliciously, and then, as their eyes met, they both smiled, and Joan shook her head in a charming manner, that said plainly, "Nay, my friend, not till we know each other better."

"Good night, then, Joan ; God bless thee," said Joan's

sweetheart of half a day; and to satisfy the farmer, he stooped down, and gave the little hand on the wheel a sounding kiss.

"Woll, that's dormed honest courtship, and thee's welcome to stay as long as thee loikes," said Bristow shaking Arkdale's hand at the foot of the ladder.

The farmer not only saw his guest up the ladder, but took the ladder away as soon as Arkdale reached the loft. Then, bidding Joan "mind and not set the place a-fire," he went upstairs.

Arkdale was a sound sleeper, accustomed to snatch his rest when and where he could; but that night a very trivial and monotonous noise kept him awake. It was the sound of Joan's wheel.

When he first perceived it he smiled, and thought it pleasant company in that strange place. He should but sleep the sweeter for hearing it. It was not long, however, before he began to put his fingers in his ears, and mutter, with a wry face—

"By the mass, Joan, 'tis no lullaby! I'd as lief thy task was done."

But there was no escaping the steady, humdrum sound, or, if he did escape it for a minute by half smothering himself in the hay, he could not resist lifting up his head to listen again—to exclaim to himself each time, “At it still, by the mass !”

The old church he had seen as they came by the ferry struck the night hours—nine, ten, eleven—and still Joan’s wheel droned on, and still Joan’s wooer listened, and was restless.

“Good Lord,” thought he, at the last striking of the clock, “how many hours of thy life dosta spin away like this, my poor Joan, and all for that paltry little wage of thine !”

He drew himself to the edge of the loft, and from its darkness looked across to the pale light of Joan’s rush candle.

She sat there spinning as for dear life. The faint light touched her hair and white neckerchief. Her thin and deft hands moved swiftly.

Great moths came and dashed themselves against her hair, as if taking that for the centre of the untimely light.

Great shadows crept to her feet, or leaned to her from walls, and made her cower in her chair, and gaze at them with her blue eyes full of vague alarm.

If a bit of rotten wood were knocked down by the rats, or a breeze knocked the boughs of ripe apples against the window, her lips parted and her eyes stared widely with fright, but her hands toiled on.

It was evident to Arkdale she was too well used to the night hours, and the terrors they presented to her ignorant and superstitious mind, to stop her labour on account of them. Her very heart might stand still for fright sooner than her wheel.

While watching her, Arkdale fell asleep, and dreamt he was defending her against ghosts, collegians, and Merry Andrews, till one of the youths, his sleeping companions, dealt him a smart blow in the back, and growled—

“Dorm thee, Luke ! keep thy fists to theeself, woll ’ee ? ”

When Arkdale woke in the morning it was broad daylight. The ladder was back in its old place, and the young men were gone.

On coming down he found the kitchen deserted. A back door stood open, and Arkdale saw a draw-well in the garden. He went to it, refreshed himself by a wash, and dried his face on some linen laid over the rosemary bushes to bleach.

Then he began to look about for Joan. He went back to the kitchen and found the old woman, and inquired about Joan, and heard she was round at the back helping one Margery with the churning.

He found the churn at last under an elder tree. Joan stood near it resting, and Margery was taking her turn at the churning, and repeating some words over and over again. On approaching near, Arkdale heard the words, which were these:—

“Come butter, come !
Come butter, come !
Peter’s at the garden gate,
Waiting for a buttered cake,
Come, butter, come !”

“Why, lassies!” exclaimed Arkdale, laughing; “what jargon do you call that?”

"Jargon!" answered Joan, tossing her head; "'tis a charm to bring the butter, and no jargon. A woman out of Staffordshire told it to my grandmother, and I have never known it fail. 'Tis certain to bring the butter if you do but keep on saying it till it comes. Is it not, Margery?"

Margery assented, and went on repeating the charm with great energy.

Joan, in answer to an inquiring and pleading look from Arkdale, drew down her long, light sleeves, and accompanied him thoughtfully into the garden.

That weedy, neglected little wilderness showed signs of having had more refined and order-loving owners once upon a time. But now the pigs had the run of it, and were shaking the flowers from the rose trees in order to enjoy the luxury of scratching themselves against the thorns.

The cocks and hens spent most of the day here, and kept up a perpetual cackle of happiness over the wealth of seeds, and roots, and insects.

"When did you finish your spinning last night?" asked



Arkdale, moving the trailing branches out of Joan's way with his stick.

"Before midnight," answered she.

"'Twas time thou didst give over, Joan."

"And why?"

"Because thou hast managed to spin my heart out of me, pretty one."

"Come, now," said Joan tremulously, and standing still and plucking a leaf to pieces, "I liked you yesterday for your honest and plain speaking. The same kind will suit me best to-day."

"It suits me, too, Joan," answered Arkdale, "though I felt honest enough when I spoke just now. However, I will be honester still, if it pleases you, and tell you I am longing with all my heart to hear from you the dear word I was so bold as to make sure of yesterday in speaking to the farmer. All I have seen of you, Joan Merryweather, makes more strong my wish to have you to be my best friend and my help through life, and to be the mother of my little child."

"Your child!" repeated Joan.

"Did I not tell you of my boy?" asked Arkdale, in surprise. "Did I not tell you yesterday I was a widower?"

"Nay, that you did not, of a surety," said Joan, with some sharpness.

"I had no need to keep it from you, Joan. My poor wife has left me the finest boy you ever saw. I fancy I see thee with him on thy knee."

Joan looked thoughtful.

"'Tis hap-hazard work," said she, "to be second wife to any man."

"Why?" asked Arkdale. "Sure, Joan, for a man to have a blessing and lose it, and suffer for its loss, is the way to make him cherish it dearly if 'tis given him again."

"But is it not the way with all of us," said Joan, "to consider that which has gone before better than that which we have at the present?"

"As for that," answered Arkdale quietly, "my wife is an angel in heaven, and I run down her worth for no woman living."

Joan was silent for some time. Soon she looked up, and said simply—

"I have heard my mother tell that no man could really love a second time."

"Thy mother spoke of men who had never seen thee, Joan," said Arkdale close to her ear as the path narrowed. "But now for the plain speaking, sweetheart, which you like so well. I have given thee enough; 'tis now thy turn. Joan, wilt thee be my wife?"

He stood still at her side.

Joan's fingers dropped the leaf they had been fretting. She stood trembling a little, and musing deeply, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

It was a greater crisis in her life than Arkdale guessed. He thought she was weighing her chances of happiness in going with him in the balance with her present lonely and toilsome safety.

But Joan had decided all that in her own quick, busy brain on the previous night. It was not doubt that agitated her now, but rather the certainty that there really stood before her the husband decreed to her by heaven; for she and Margery had settled over the churn that morning that Arkdale was indeed the man.

They were positive they recognised the same features in his face that a fortune-teller had shown them at the bottom of a certain pool, and Margery was confident that Arkdale's figure was the very double to that she had seen following her friend one Michaelmas Eve, when Joan had tried the spell of throwing hemp-seed over her left shoulder.

So Joan stood trembling, and glancing with eyes full of subdued awe at the surroundings of this long-expected moment.

The blue sky, the position of the snowy morning clouds, the colour of the russet apples over Arkdale's head, remained fixed in her memory in connection with that moment all her life.

There were times in after years when the very crowing of the cocks at early morning made her writhe upon her bed and gnash her teeth at memory whose poisoned sweet-ness had entered even so homely a sound as that—times, too, when a mellow, hazy morning, with dew hanging about it as late as the dew hung about it this September morning, made her sad and suspicious of the day's issues.

But now all these things seemed but auguries of change,

love, and happiness; of wakening from dull sleep to delicious life.

"Joan," said Arkdale, believing her to be struggling with her doubt, "if you trust me, by God's grace I will cherish you and make you a happy woman."

He spoke earnestly, though the moment had not such solemnity for him as it had for Joan. He looked on the affair as an important stroke of business, the pleasantness of which was rapidly increasing upon him.

There was half a smile on his face as he bent down to her with extended hands and said—

"Come, sweetheart, yea or nay?"

Joan put her hands in his and looked up, and the tears and passion on her face surprised Arkdale, and filled him with a strange and joyful emotion.

"Then I hold mine own," he said, taking Joan to his heart.

And Joan looked up and smiled, and Arkdale kissed her in great wonder and happiness at the love he saw in her eyes.

"Sweetheart," said he, "folks should not think of trouble

and woe only when they say, ‘Who knoweth what to-morrow may bring forth ?’ for this time yesterday I had not even dreamt of thee.”

During breakfast Farmer Bristow proposed that Joan should take advantage of an opportunity offered by one of his wagons going to the Cambridge market on the following day, to pay a visit with Arkdale to an old grand-aunt of Joan’s, who lived in that town.

“ ‘Tis what I should have liked of all things,” said Arkdale; “but I am obliged to set out early to-morrow morning for Harwich, where I have some particular business.”

“ Woll, never turn thy back on business, lad. But I am a fool to teach a scholard his A B C,” said the farmer, with a grin.

So the next morning, when the roads were soft after the night’s storm, Humphrey Arkdale set out for Harwich.

Down a Lancashire road, bright with October yellow, there rattled merrily, ’midst clashing of loose chains and jingle of bells, a miller’s van. The curtains were looped

back at the front and rear, and thus left a double oval frame, which filled with harvest pictures, mellow and warm, and changing incessantly, as the van sped on.

The front figures in the picture—the inmates of the van—of course remained the same; and these were, the red-haired miller himself, who drove, sitting sideways and winking his powdered eyelashes in the sun; a young woman, blue-eyed and sunburnt, sitting on a heap of sacks and looking onwards in an idle reverie, with her snowy teeth half buried in a scarlet streaked apple; and lastly a lazy fellow, stretched at full length at the bottom of the van, with his head on her knees.

With these two in the foreground, the picture through the curtains of the van was always pleasant, whether it had for a background a hill of standing sheaves, touched with the fire of the sunset, or clump of oaks reddening to gold, or cottage with a lithe, bold-eyed girl clinging to its eaves, and, heedless of her mother's shaking fist, plucking and flinging down the ripe grapes to the children swarming round the gate.

The chains clattered, the curtains flapped in the mellow

breeze, the great horses shook their great manes and showed their great bright shoes with a good will; sometimes the miller sang, and sometimes the girl, and sometimes they all three sang together, and were assisted in their chorus by a tramp at the tail-board, who, to escape the miller's whip, should have held his peace.

But mirth is contagious, and that merry, noisy van infected all the roads with it, from the ragged children gleaned the fields, who shaded their eyes with their handful of corn, and stared and shouted after it, to the very dust that whirled behind it, round and round and over and over, as if every grain were inspired with boisterous life.

Suddenly the girl stopped in the midst of the old song, "The Cruelty of Barbara Allen," which had sent the lazy fellow whose head lay on her knee fast asleep. She stopped; and with her lips still apart, as when the song flowed through them, and with kindling eyes, touched the miller's arm, and pointed to where stood against the horizon, like a grey, uneven fringe, a cluster of house-roofs.

"Master," said she, to the miller, "you told me 'twas the next town we should see, but—but is *that*—"

"Ay, Bolton, sure," said the miller.

"It *is*?" cried the girl; and at the same time her hand, which was held by her sleepy companion, clasped his so tightly that he woke, turned his head, and looked up at her. She was looking right on, her eyes growing tearful, her lips beginning to quiver.

"Why, Joan, what is to do? What dosta see?" asked he, in tender surprise.

"My home, sweetheart, my home," she said; and the gathered tears ran down, and she smiled upon him with all the sweetness that had been deepening and mellowing in her face, like the colour on the corn, the bloom upon the fruit, all their long journey through.

The rich brown face on her knee looked troubled for an instant, then the great limbs were drawn up, and, sitting beside her on the sacks, the young man put an arm round her, and would have taken her hand, but that both her hands were clasped, while her face bent over them. Soon she looked up and took his hand.

"Do you know, Humphrey," said she, "they have a custom in that part my mother came from, that I never

heard of elsewhere, and yet I can but think it good? 'Tis that a wife, at first sight of her new home, should kneel and ask a blessing on it, and on her ingoing. Dear heart! such have I now done. Will you not say, 'Amen' to my prayer?"

"God bless thee, lass! I'll say Amen to that. I would to the other, too, but that it rather goes against a strong fellow like me to acknowledge yon sorry hole as a home at all. To me, my Joan, 'tis but a workshop wherein I am making the foundations of that home I have told thee of; and, indeed, I would have thee ask blessings upon that, and look on this but as a sort of tarrying-place on the road, for only as such dare I ask thy patience with it a little while."

Joan shook her head, and looked on with a yearning smile to the housetops coming near.

"Ah!" she said, "it will never be with any other as with this. In this I shall know if I am to be happy or miserable all my life long. In 'yon sorry hole,' as you call it, shall I have for the first time the happiness I have so often longed for, of saying 'This is mine.' Now, Hum-

phrey, tell me for the present of this home, where to-night I shall sit down with you and your child, and be happier than I have ever been in my life ; tell me of this and no other, for I am like Lubin Grimthorne's bride. Do you know how the song goes ? ” And she sang, in a low voice :—

“ An’ there, where she had come a bride,
Wi’ heart sae leal and lovin’,
She prayed she might till death abide,
An’ know nor change nor rovin’.”

It chanced that the miller knew Joan’s song, which, indeed, belonged rather to his part of the country than to hers, and, while Humphrey whispered, “ God forbid, lass, thee shouldst abide there long,” the miller, taking up the song at the last verse, droned out, in a deep, sonorous voice,—

“ Alack, the bride, the bonny bride,
That death should be her dowry ;
She roved no more till forth they bore
The fairest corse in Gowrie ! ”

Joan, always on the look-out for omens and portents, shivered, but laughed merrily when Humphrey said,—

"Come, come, Mr. Miller, prithee give us a livelier ditty, or folks will swear we are from a burial."

The miller, in return for the rebuff, made Joan uncomfortable by throwing ominous glances at her baggage, which occupied a good part of the van.

"We must have our wits about us, for I am certain he means to ask more than we bargained for," whispered she.

"Well, take it all in all, it has been a cheap journey for me, sweetheart," answered Arkdale, "and I cannot but feel a little rueful that it will so soon come to an end."

And then they sat quiet, hand in hand, thinking, Arkdale regretfully, of the long, happy journey; Joan of that journey's end.

The journey, indeed, had been one of unbroken pleasure. No coachdriver or wagoner had overcharged them or maltreated Joan's baggage, now safely packed in the van of the Bolton miller. It is true, they were both so well pleased with each stage of their journey that they would hardly have considered any price within their means too dear to pay for it. Joan was as delighted with all she saw as a woman who had scarcely before set foot out of her

own country well could be; and Arkdale had so much pleasure in her delight and wonder, as to be constantly going out of his way to show her such famous places as they might be passing near to.

At Huntingdon he had taken her to see the birthplace of Cromwell. They stayed at Oakham, in the midst of the lovely valley of Catmose, for half a day, and Joan thought she had never seen such harvest fields. They tasted the renowned Nottingham ale, visited the caves at Matlock, saw Mary Queen of Scots' prison at Buxton, and enjoyed a day's sight-seeing at Manchester, where they were a good deal stared at—Joan fancied on account of her countrified dress, but it is more probable to have been the hale, sunburnt, and comely appearance of the young couple that drew on them the attention of the pale-faced mechanics and weavers of the great town.

By day they had warm, dry weather, by night deep skies crowded with stars, and below them heavy dews, that made the distant valleys like sheets of water.

Arkdale looked back on these things as a schoolboy looks back on a long, delicious holiday as it draws to a

close. He thought of his wedding morning, of Joan, looking so bright and sweet in her wedding bravery—the gown of French cambric, sprigged with scarlet, he had given her, and the scarlet rose wreath he had seen Margery and Joan sitting on the old wall by five in the morning to make. He thought of Farmer Bristow's surly generosity, of the kindness of Joan's neighbours, of Joan's quiet conquering of her grief at leaving the old home—a grief which was only shown at the latest minute, when, with a rush of tears, she suddenly slipped on her knees and kissed the old doorstone.

There had been no weeping, no regretting since; nothing but sunshine and buoyant hope and holiday-making. Sometimes, indeed, Arkdale thought, with a little wonder, that she had been over quick in forgetting what she had seemed to hold so dear; but, as the thought was flattering to himself, he only loved her the better for it, and his content with his hasty bargain was great.

But Joan, as the miller's great horses bore her merrily into Bolton, knew her own heart better than Arkdale did. She knew her love of home had not lessened one whit, but

that, instead of lingering behind, it had gone before, to the home where Arkdale's little one awaited her, and there had clung, with a blind passion that would see no defect Arkdale tried to prepare her for.

She could not turn her thoughts with any pleasure to that home of the future of which he talked so much, and which was to possess such wondrous perfection. With such ideas as he had of what a house should be, she could not be surprised at the contempt he expressed for that to which he was now taking her, and which Joan had no doubt was a straight town house, with perhaps as many as four windows in the front—proper town windows, which Joan would have rival in brightness all the windows of the street. She could see it in her mind's eye quite plainly, as she would have it, even to the bit of stone-crop on the roof, to guard against lightning. She was delighted to think how long it was since any woman had meddled there—how it was reserved for *her* to bring havoc to order, to wipe the dust from Arkdale's household gods, and set them up in freshened beauty. She was prepared to touch them with tender reverence, as things

an angel's hands had laid down unwillingly, for it pleased her now to think the former mistress of that house an angel. Since Arkdale would not own her less worthy than Joan, Joan would have her something infinitely beyond all women.

It was now dark. The horses fell into a slow, heavy walk; the miller tugged, and swore, and glanced vindictively at Joan's baggage. Now and then a light from a solitary house would flicker across the road.

Joan, with her arm clasped in Arkdale's, peered out at the front of the van with impatient, longing eyes.

"How strange!" said she. "This is the first starless night we have had since we set forth."

"It matters little," answered Arkdale; "we are within a stone's throw of home."

"And our fireside will only seem the brighter," said Joan softly.

As they came into the town with great noise and ado, many persons ran out of their houses and beset the miller with questions concerning parcels or messages with which he had been entrusted; and, as he often had to stop in the

flare of some shop light, Arkdale was soon recognised by innumerable friends and neighbours, some of whom would run along by the van and shout out scraps of news in a dialect with which Joan was completely puzzled.

She drew away from Arkdale's side, whilst he leant forwards, shaking hands and exchanging hearty greetings all the way.

The news of his wedding had been carried into Bolton by a Manchester weaver, and Joan could see many an inquisitive face trying to look past Arkdale's broad shoulders into the van, and could hear many a sly inquiry as to what he had brought from the fair.

Arkdale parried these questions by asking questions himself. Had Jenkyns—Arkdale's apprentice—given satisfaction in his absence? And had he still the honour of being the cheapest barber in Bolton? and of serving the most respected of its townspeople?

Before he could be answered he was told that Jenkyns had just heard of his arrival, and was flying down the street, razor in hand, having left Simon Blutcher, of the "Royal George," with his beard half off and half on.

Then Joan, who was sure this apprentice of Humphrey's would be a thorn in her side, heard a panting, and saw a thin, pale face, with bright eyes and long untied hair, thrust in at the front of the van.

"Well, Jenkyns," shouted Arkdale, as the van went on and Jenkyns ran, "how are you, and how's the boy?"

"Oh, ain't he well!" answered Jenkyns between his panting. "And don't he eat; and ain't he as good as gold; and don't he keep the money!"

"Does he?" said Arkdale, in a half-pleased, half-puzzled voice.

The van was going at a quicker pace now, and no one keeping up with it but Jenkyns.

"Keeps the money, does he?" said Arkdale, taking Joan's hand.

"Just don't he; and don't he laugh and skirl when he hears it a-jingling in the box!"

"I hope there's plenty there, Jenkyns," cried Arkdale, his paternal pride suddenly giving place to business anxiety. "What art doing shaking your head? Do you mean to say, sir, business is going badly?"

"Oh, ain't it, that's all!" answered Jenkyns, who seemed always to make his replies interrogatively.

"The dence it is!" shouted Arkdale, letting go Joan's arm and leaning out anxiously.

"Just ain't it!" said Jenkyns.

"Then you've been muddling, or has Pritchard been at it again?" cried Arkdale.

"Been at it!" said Jenkyns, getting more and more shrill as he got more and more short of breath. "Ain't he been at it!"

"Has he?" asked Arkdale.

"Ain't he got a board out large as life," gasped Jenkyns — "Why go over the way, when you can be shaved here for one penny?" And ain't I a'most learned Dick his letters off it, for want of nothing else to do. 'For,' says I to the child, 'if it gets your father's customers out of us, we'll get your education out of it.'"

"A nice expensive education, upon my word," muttered Arkdale.

The van now stopped. Jenkyns disappeared, and, as Arkdale was assisting Joan down, came running back to

say that Simon Blutcher was going over to Pritchard's, with the cloths about his neck, swearing frightfully.

"Then you've lost me the custom of the 'Royal George,' from landlord to boots," exclaimed Arkdale, angrily. "Joan, lass, I must go after the fellow. Get thee in with Jenkyns. And, Jenkyns, we must bestir us. Hang me if I don't have a board out to-night—'A clean shave for a halfpenny.' And you let it come to Pritchard's ears, lad, that if he tries that I'll go to a farthing. Miller, do you help my 'prentice with the baggage, and we'll have our reckoning in half an hour's time at the 'George,' over a glass at my damage. Now get thee in, sweetheart. I trust Jenkyns has it all ship-shape, such as it is, and a good supper."

"Ship-shape! A good supper!" Jenkyns echoed, staring after his master as he hurried away. "Well, master's a cool one. Ship-shape, too! Why he knows as the chimley fell in o' one side o' the Friday 'fore he went, and Dick an' me's bin black with smoke ever since. Ship-shape, eh! and Dick's pulled the bucket o' water I just drawed all over him, and the bantam a-moultin' his fea-



thers all over the place. We're nice uns to be ship-shape, we are. Well, mistress, it's no good standin' here. Give us hold of your hand, for the steps is roughish to a stranger. I fell into the place head-forrads when I first come from London. I s'pose master told yer I was from London, didn't he?"

"No," answered Joan meekly, taking his hand and being led by him like a passive child.

She had a strange feeling that she was seeing and listening, walking and speaking, in a dream.

The house up to which Jenkyns led her—the dreary house, all dark but where the light was flaring from a window in the area—looked more like a house in a dream than a real house.

"'Tis a large house," said she, in a whisper, as Jenkyns led her down the steps into the area.

"Yes, large enough," answered Jenkyns; "but that ain't nothing to us, you know."

"Oh," said Joan, dreamily.

"Of course not; we only lives in the cellar, you know that I s'pose? Now, hold hard, and look out for that

twist, cos there's only one step there where there ought to be two. Now, what's the matter? it's all right; you're in the light now; what are yer stoppin' for?"

"We—live—in—the cellar?"

"Why, didn't you know that?"

"No."

"What! not as master was the subteranum barber?" asked Jenkyns, looking quite shocked at her ignorance.

"No," murmured Joan.

"Well, here we are now, and there's Dick, a young Turk! Ain't he been and picked the gallon loaf I gave him to keep him quiet right in two! Well, go in and make yourself at home, while I see about the baggage. And I say" (turning back), "just get things there or thereabouts by the time master comes in, will you?"

And with this introduction Jenkyns left his master's wife alone on the threshold.

The door was open. Joan stood and looked, and did not move a step. Before her was a cellar, lighted by two flaring candles placed near the window, that was shut in by the area walls. Round about the window and door the

place was furnished as a barber's shop, and wigs, brushes, combs, soap-balls, and cloths were strewed over chairs, floor, and table. The far end of the cellar, where a fire burnt gloomily, was fitted up with a rude attempt at domestic comfort. There was a table, a couple of broken wooden chairs, and a swing book-shelf, full of books.

Joan saw something shining on the floor before the fire. It was the contents of the bucket Jenkyns had just taken in, and in the midst of the pool, with his little night-shirt rolled up round his neck, sat a child like an infant Hercules, with large, dimpled limbs, and glittering hair. He was leaning against the overturned bucket, and was smiling, with eyes full of love, at a wretched, ragged-looking hen, who had gone to roost on a chair-rail near him, and with outstretched hand and soft, cooing voice, the child was trying to lure it into his bath. This was Humphrey Arkdale's son and heir.

While his step-mother stood looking at him, there came a puff of black smoke down the chimney and hid him; and when it cleared away and she saw him again, he was taking his arms from before his face, and gazing up at the

chimney shadows with mock awe, while he said, in a voice of the freshest, clearest music Joan had ever heard—

“Boo, boggarts! Boo!”

The beauty of the child, his fearlessness at being alone in this strange place, made Joan more than ever sure she was under the influence of a dream. She seemed to feel herself moving to and fro with the jolting of the van; to feel Arkdale’s arm round her, and to be sure his voice would soon awaken her and dispel that hideous picture—that wretched den-like chamber, the black walls, the flaring light, and the shadows that seemed to beckon her and give her mocking welcomes.

While she stood thus there came the miller and Jenkyns, blundering down the steps with her spinning-wheel. At that she put her hands up to her eyes, and said shudderingly,—

“ ‘Tis getting too real. Let me wake—let me wake!”

At that moment the sound she had longed for met her ear. She heard Arkdale’s voice saying,—

“Gently, miller. Mind, Jenkyns, mind; we shall have the mistress about our ears.”

Then, when she had heard his voice, and it did not wake her to the van and the green roads—when she had heard it, and found herself still there on the threshold of that place—she knew that all was indeed real, and no dream ; she had come home.

The cheery voices and steps came nearer. There was no room to step aside. Joan shivered, and fled in. She had seen a door open at the far end of the cellar. She went to the door ; entered, and closed it, and in the darkness found a low bed, on which she sat down. The room was cold. She sat and shivered, as if chilled to the very heart.

Joan was not imaginative. She was not used to picture to herself what a place or person unseen might be like. As a rule, unseen things had no place in her mind. She was not used to wonder about them. Yet she was a thoughtful woman ; but her thoughts dwelt only on what was certain. Not narrow-minded, for many great things were certain to her, and made ample food for both sweet and bitter reflection. The sufferings of the poor, love, death, God—all these were certainties to Joan. Her

mother had been a deeply religious woman, and had given Joan a better heritage than simple faith in God—for, from her earliest years, Joan thought she *knew* there was a God; that the knowledge—not the faith, but the actual knowledge—had been born with her. She believed every one must be the same as herself, and had no pity for those who fell in darkness of soul. To her all sin was infamous, and virtue was only sense.

But when into this matter-of-fact mind an impression of an unseen thing was once received, it was accepted as a sort of divine vision of the truth. As such Joan accepted the idea of Arkdale's home—the idea which his sunny, genial nature had forced into her mind, in spite of all he said in its dispraise; and now, as she sat alone in the darkness and squalor of her little bedchamber, with the picture of that outer chamber in her mind, the parting with her cherished idea cost her a pain as great as parting with a real thing could have done. She could not accuse Arkdale of deception, yet she felt a passionate resentment against him, that made her look up with flashing eyes every time his footsteps passed near the door.

At last, after much noise and talking and laughter, the departure of the miller, and the barring of the outer door, the door of the little room where Joan sat opened, and Arkdale stood before her. He had come to bring her his boy, and he stood before her, holding a light that showed the child's great sleepy eyes, flashing at her like diamonds.

"Joan," said he, in those low, rich tones that seemed to come from depths Joan had not yet fathomed—"Joan," said he, "in giving thee this little one, I feel most as a mother feels when giving her first-born into her husband's arms. I have bought him dear; I have bought him with a life more precious to me than mine own; yet, sweetheart, if thee wilt take him to thyself, and he can make amends to thee for the poverty and shortcomings of his dad, I am blest indeed in having him to give."

Joan had looked forward to this receiving of Arkdale's little child as one of the greatest events of her life. When she looked on the child's beauty, and into Arkdale's proud, fond eyes, the thought of what this moment might have been to both came over her, and made her heart ache as if it would burst.

She got up; Arkdale moved as if to place the child in her arms. Joan half extended them, then let them fall. Tender longing and bitter disappointment clashed in her bosom, and wrung from her a cry—a sudden, shrill cry.

Arkdale's very lips whitened; he looked round fearfully at the little bed. The last time such a cry had been heard in this room it had been a death cry.

Joan saw his look, guessed his thought, and leaned her head against the door, to which she had gone, faint with shame.

"Good God! Joan, was that you?" he said hoarsely.

"Forgive me; I did not mean—I could not help it—I am ill—ill."

"Ill! In truth thou art. I see it."

In an instant little Dick was thrown on the bed, and his father's arm round Joan. Yet in that instant the truth had flashed into Arkdale's mind.

"Joan, Joan! I see how it is with thee. Fool that I was, I sent thee in alone with that jabber-jaw Jenkyns. Thou'rt shocked at the place—heartbroken. My poor lass! what shall I do?"

Joan turned her head away. She felt as if all the kindness he could show her would not make up for the bitter heartache the sight of the place gave her.

"I did prepare thee, my Joan, all thee wouldest let me, for what thee wast to see, did I not?" asked he.

"Yes," said Joan, in a dry, bitter voice. "'Twas I who was the cheat."

She put his arm from her, and turned away her head with a look of stubborn pain. He gazed at her with eyes full of distress and perplexity.

"Thee knowst, sweetheart," said he, "I couldna journey back when I had won thee to make ready another home; but thee knowst, too, I will labour hard till I see thee in a home worthy of thee. I trust that will be at no such distant day; and I do pray you to comfort yourself during our short sojourn here with looking forward to that home which shall be such a home as——"

"What!" said Joan, interrupting him suddenly, and in a sharp, low tone, "look forward again to what is not? Never, Humphrey Arkdale—never. I can bear the natural troubles of life as they are sent me as well as most o' the



world, but disappointment I cannot bear—it kills me. Disappointment I *will not risk.*"

"Thou'rt ill, my Joan; we will talk of these things another time," Arkdale said gently. "For the present, tell me that thee dost not blame me—that thou art not disappointed in thine husband as in thine home."

Joan knew her disappointment and wretchedness would rest long upon her, and, for the moment, she felt too bitter in heart to give comfort to Arkdale while she must still keep miserable; so she said, as if an evil spirit moved her tongue,—

"My home was all in all to me."

Arkdale looked at her for a moment or two in silence. Then he drew a deep breath, and said, slowly and hesitatingly, as if every word had terrible meaning for him,—

"Did Joan Merryweather marry me for—a home?"

Joan held her breath. She remembered how solemn a moment it had seemed to her when she gave him her troth that morning in the ruined garden—how far from her any thought but love had been. Her heart cried to her to throw herself at his feet and tell him this; but Joan was a

woman who could not suffer without having a passionate thirst to have those nearest and dearest to her suffer with her. She knew she must suffer for some time before her disappointment wore away. Why should Humphrey be made glad?

"Did Joan Merryweather marry me for—a home?" said he.

And Joan, after a fierce struggle with herself, answered—"For what else should she marry you—*you*, a stranger?"

Arkdale remained looking on the floor in silence. It seemed to Joan he stood there many minutes; perhaps it was but one. Then he went quietly to the door. Dick called after him. Arkdale turned back, took the child up, and carried him out with him.

Joan tottered to the door, and fell on her knees by it, shaking all over with great, silent sobs. There was a wide crack in the middle of the door, through which she saw the firelight. Her eyes sought this, and she saw Arkdale standing by the chimney-place, with his child in his arms and his back towards her. Presently Jenkyns came with

a spoon to stir Dick's porridge that was boiling on the fire.

"Jenkyns," said Arkdale, and Joan took away her eyes and put a burning ear to the crack.

"Ay?" answered Jenkyns.

"What dost think of thy mistress, Jenkyns?"

"She ain't give me much time to think of anythink," replied the 'prentice, "what with the place being flooded, and her not putting her hands to nothink."

"Dost think her fair?"

"'Andsome is as 'andsome does," said Jenkyns.

"Hark ye, my lad," said his master. "I have made much of you, and let you go on pretty well as you like. Seeing that all your kin have died off since you have been in my service, I have been more of a father than a master to you; but I tell you plainly, lad, if you do not use a civil tongue to your mistress, and serve her diligently in all you can, I will give you such a drubbing as you won't forget this side o' Christmas. So look to it. Poor soul, poor soul, away from all she cares for! Coming away with a stranger for the sake of a home, and finding this!"

As Jenkyns took away the boy to feed him, his master sat down on the chimney seat, and buried his face in his hands.

"Thee'l't mind what I say to thee, Jenkyns?" he said presently.

"Yes," answered Jenkyns. "I don't want my bones broke for no woman."

"But thee'l't serve her for love, lad, and not for fear?"

"Whichever you likes to call it, master," said Jenkyns; "love or fear—fear o' your drubbing or love o' my bones; it comes to much about the same thing. Will madam take her supper?"

"Ay, lad, well thought of; she must be faint for want. We have not broken our fast since morning. Give me that porringer."

"Nay, that's yours," said Jenkyns gruffly.

"Give it me, I say; and Dick shall come and help to carry it."

"Not 'fore he's had his own," averred Jenkyns, who had no notion of any human creature being served before his

two masters. "He's only jest this moment got off the wilence of his hunger, and begun to eat for pleasure."

So Arkdale took the plate, and went alone to the room where Joan was.

She had risen to her feet, and he found her standing just within the door, very pale, and breathing quickly.

"I have brought thee thy supper, Joan. Art not sore in need of it?"

Joan looked at it with great wistful eyes.

Was this the meal—the first meal at home—the sort of holy consecration feast she had in her thoughts prepared so many times so deftly, so lovingly? Was this it?—brought to her in her chamber, like a prisoner's dole to his cell?

She looked at it, and at Arkdale's kind, grieved face, and burst out crying.

"Come, Joan," said Arkdale, in the voice of one almost broken-hearted, "'tis a poor supper, but better food for thee than thy tears. Eat, lass, and may God give thee patience in thy cruel disappointment. He knows I feel for thee."

"Take it away; I cannot eat."

"Then lay thee down and rest, and maybe thee'll take it in a little while."

"I cannot rest; I cannot eat. Oh, let me breathe one breath out of this place, or I shall die."

The shrill wail in which she spoke made Jenkyns rise to his feet and stare round with face aghast.

"Joan, listen to me," said Arkdale. "*This place*, such as it is, is your husband's home. I am ashamed of it, grieved to bring you into it, sorely grieved to see your sorrow at it! yet let me tell you that, as honest labour is done here, and honest bread is broken, the air is good enough for you or any woman living to breathe."

"One threw so well upon it, did she not?" said Joan, with terrible quietness.

He answered not a word, but went away, and left her alone.

He sent Jenkyns away to his bed at the cobbler's hard by, bolted and barred the place, then sat down by the fire with Dick in his arms.

"My boy," Joan heard him say, "thou'rt more precious to me than I thought."

And thus passed the first night of Joan's entrance into Humphrey Arkdale's household.

"Hush, Jenkyns! I trust thy mistress sleeps. See and make a fire, and have breakfast ready; but step softly, lad, if thee canst."

"Step softly!" repeated Jenkyns, staring at his master as he took off his cap, and put back his long, lank hair. "Why, master, you don't mean it—a woman in the place, and you working without a fire, and never broke your fast this time o' day! Wait till I get the winder-bar down, I'll rouse the idle hussey."

"You'll do just as you're told, my boy. Hold your tongue, and make the fire."

As Arkdale, as if accidentally, fingered a certain strap, with which the shoulders of Jenkyns had more than once made warm acquaintance, the 'prentice only hung his head, muttering, as he took off and folded up his clean blue and white checked apron—

"And there's Dick, too. Who's to make *his* breakfast?"

"Who made it before, booby?"

"Who?" echoed Jenkyns, looking round as he sank on his knees before the fireplace. "D'ye s'pose there's a young gal or a widder in this town that ain't been here in her turn while you've been gone, with something or other for Dick? Was there ever a morning I opened the door without finding somebody waiting with a smokin' hot pipkin o' new milk or a gallipot o' gruel, and askin' so kindly to be allowed to feed him as you'd a-thought he was the son and heir of the Lord Mayor, and so pleasant to me, too, with alwis a 'Good mornin' to ye, Jenkyns,' an' 'Any news o' your master, Jenkyns?' an' 'You'll tell him, Jenkyns, how aggrieved I was I couldn't do no more for the sweet lamb,' eh? But the tale's changed now, master, since you brought madam home yesterday—nothing but black looks as I come along this mornin'; an' I reckon poor Dick may sing for his supper or whistle for his breakfast now."

Dick lay on the floor in a bright beam of sunshine, that

seemed to be radiating from him rather than shining down on him, so bright and lovely was the child in his morning freshness and sweet health. His eyes were gazing up at his father, who, from time to time, in spite of his sadness, glanced down, and exchanged with Dick looks of laughing idolatry. That sadness Dick regarded only as a bit of deep fun to make him laugh, and tried all he could to show his father his appreciation of it by puffing out his cheeks, blowing bubbles with his mouth, throwing himself on his back, and pointing delightedly with his rosy, dimpled foot at the unusual lines in poor Humphrey's face. Fun had always been the order of the day with these two; and neither of them being able to make themselves understood by words, they expressed their adoration for each other by laughter—not necessarily audible laughter, though there was plenty of that, but a silent laughter of the eye and lip, well understood by both.

Dick's merry noises, the crackling of the logs, and the clatter of the old and cracked utensils Jenkyns was setting on the breakfast-table, were the sounds which awakened Joan.

She woke happily, with a smile on her face and Arkdale's name on her lip. She thought they were at the inn where they had stayed the previous night, with the last stage of their journey before them: but her bright, refreshed eyes falling on a child's shoe and a child's toy, she recollected all. The name breathed in tenderness was repeated in agony, with her lips buried in the pillow.

"Humphrey—oh, sweetheart! what has come between us?"

Her next feeling, as she lay listening, was jealousy—jealousy of poor Jenkyns.

"The meddling fool!" she sobbed, as she rose, and began to dress indignantly. "How dare he touch *my* things? I would I had waked sooner."

She dressed herself with as much care as if it had been Sunday or fair-day at home. She looked wondrous well—her neckerchief was like snow, her hair like nothing in the world but the loveliest flaxen hair. The little glass in Arkdale's cellar reflected a face infinitely more fair than the little Cam had shown him that September evening;

for the last few weeks of happiness, idleness, and roadside fare had wonderfully enriched Joan's small share of beauty, giving it that softness, colour, and repose it had always needed.

Jenkyns was just pausing with a cup in his hand, considering in his own mind whether his mistress deserved her cup setting for her or not, when the door opened, and she made her appearance.

Jenkyns was so startled, he dropped the cup, and it broke to pieces. He had never really seen his mistress before, and was sufficiently struck by her appearance to stand still, as he had been standing, on his awkward toes, with his tongue in his cheek. Joan did not allow him much time for looking at her.

"How is this?" demanded she, advancing imperiously. "Has your master nothing for you to do, but he must needs set you a-meddling in *my* matters? Prithee, must the few things I have for use be smashed by a clumsy lout like you?"

"Prithee," answered Jenkyns, recovering his tongue and his heels at the same time, "must my master go

without his breakfast when it pleases your ladyship to lie a-bed?"

"I think your master would be better employed in giving you a sound drubbing for your insolence than sitting there working in the cold before he's had bit or sup," said Joan, trying to speak in an unconcerned voice, but growing tremulous towards the end of her sentence.

Arkdale had not yet looked up, or taken any notice of her presence. That slight quiver of her voice touched him, and he turned his head with the intention of saying something kind; but when he saw her standing in the firelight, looking so fair and fresh both in gear and face, the water rose to his eyes, and he said nothing.

Jenkyns, keeping at a safe distance from his master, seized a wig and stand, and began to comb, darting contemptuous glances at his mistress, who feigned not to see them as she swept off all his preparations for breakfast, and began to lay the table afresh.

Now and then she would ask Jenkyns if they had such and such an article, and the jealous 'prentice began to suspect she took a savage pleasure in always receiving

an answer in the negative, as if the poverty of the place was beginning to prove a pleasant sort of foil to her quickness and ingenuity.

Yet, whenever Arkdale, to whom each question and answer gave a pang, glanced towards Joan, her movements and face assumed an air of sharp resignation.

“Where’s the linen kept?” demanded she of Jenkyns.

“Linin. What do you want with linin at breakfast-time?” said Jenkyns, prevaricating in order to spare his master’s feelings.

“I want a tablecloth.”

“Why, you jest pitched it in the corner.”

“I want a clean one.”

“Well, you’ll have it when you wash that, I s’pose.”

Here Joan got out one of her own home-spun cloths, shining like satin, and spread it on the table.

“Aggrevatin’ hussy!” muttered Jenkyns to himself.

“How is this, sir? I can’t find more than one spoon!”

“Don’t s’pose you could if you was to hunt till next St. Swithin’s.”

“This coffee-pot runs.”

"You shouldn't a-scraped the black off, then. You might a-seen it was left on for a purpose."

"Are there but two of these yellow cups?"

"An' if there was three, d'y s'pose I should drink out o' the same sort as master?"

Dick, clasping his father's leg with both arms, peeped shyly round at his fair stepmother and Jenkyns, and from time to time lifted his eyes to Humphrey's face with a half-grave, half-comical look, which seemed to ask, "Is this also fun?" but his father's face left him still dubious.

"Will you take your breakfast?" said Joan, at last.
" 'Tis ready."

Arkdale rose, and after standing to warm his hands at the fire, sat down, and took Dick on his knee."

When Joan saw this, she thought of his words on the night before, and was seized with jealousy.

"I will feed the child," said she sharply, "when we have finished."

Arkdale gently put him down, and Dick looked back at him archly, but tearfully, as if he thought the "fun" were going almost too far.

Jenkyns, who had taken the seat disdainfully pointed out to him by his mistress, got up, took Dick in his arms, and went and sat in the shop.

"Come to your breakfast," said Joan, "and put that child down."

Jenkyns showed no signs of obeying.

"I'll help you, my lad, in a minute," said his master rising; "and if you don't mind your mistress next time she speaks to you, you and I'll have a little talk outside. Come, now, stir! Put the boy down, and come to the table."

"Master," answered Jenkyns, getting his back against the wall where the strap hung, "I'm very sorry, I am," and he began to blubber; "but ever since Dick was born, I've never touched bit nor sup 'fore he was served, and I never will."

Arkdale knew that this rule of Jenkyns' had not been one of mere politeness, as there had been times when, if the 'prentice had satisfied his hunger first, Dick would have come but poorly off. He hardly knew how to punish the young man for his devotion to Dick, yet he

felt Joan was expecting such open rebellion to be met with very sharp punishment. While he hesitated, she said, gently—

“Well, well, bring him with you, Jenkyns, if you think he is hungry, as perhaps he may be, since I was late this morning.”

So Jenkyns sat down with Dick on his knee, looking happy, but abashed and deferential.

All breakfast-time Joan was frigidly silent. Arkdale had a few questions to put to Jenkyns, or not a word had been spoken.

When the 'prentice went to his work, and Dick was under the table at play with the bantam, Arkdale's heart suddenly misgave him at the thoughts of beginning the day's work under such a state of things; and just as he was leaving the fireside, he turned back and stood still.

“Joan, I thank you for your good patience with Jenkyns, and with the many other annoyances you have had to deal with this morning. Believe me, I have noticed and suffered for all.”

Joan's eyes looked into the fire with a cold, resigned gaze,

that if it did not hide their tears, gave them a different meaning.

"But, of a truth, Joan, thee hast made the place so pleasant in spite of all, that thee'l't have me tarrying instead of hurrying away if thee dosna mind."

"I have but done my duty, Humphrey, as I trust to God I always may do under all circumstances."

"By the mass, my Joan," said Arkdale, with a bitter sigh, "if 'tis to be but duty for us to serve one another now, what name can we give it come ten or twenty years?"

"I have enough to do to look forward to the next few hours at présent."

He turned away with a heavy step, and went into the shop.

Poor Jenkyns had a hard morning of it.

Dick was at play at his father's feet. Joan, when she had mended an old clean frock she had found among some rubbish, and prepared his bath at the fire, went to fetch him.

Both Humphrey and Jenkyns looked round with a pang as she took him up, and carried him off without a smile or

a caress, and both listened for Dick's opinion of this unusual treatment. All was quiet, however.

When Joan had got on the other side of the curtain which was drawn across the shop in the day-time, Dick stooped, and looked inquiringly in her face. Joan, avoiding the bright, arch eyes, sat down, and jerked off his clothes, flinging each to the far end of the room: and Dick, instead of being offended as each little garment was thus disposed of, kicked and crowed with delight.

Joan's movements became more and more sharp and unkind. Dick looked serious—puzzled, and sometimes glanced wistfully round at the old curtain, but always looked back trustingly at Joan.

He put out his hand to stroke her face. Joan held him off.

"The little fool!" she said. "How can I love thee while thy father loves thee better than me?"

She was determined to quarrel with Dick, but Dick would not be quarrelled with.

As she grew more and more angry, Dick grew more convinced all was meant for fun.

At last, when, after his bath, glowing with Joan's hard usage, he sat in his little shirt on her knee, Joan paused a moment in her task, and gazed at him.

She thought him the very loveliest thing her eyes had ever seen.

"He must always love thee more than me, and I must always hate thee," she said, in her passionate heart.

Dick's eye caught the glimmer of her hair; his hand snatched at it, and pulled it down about them both like a mantle of sunshine.

Glad of the excuse, Joan slapped the dimpled arm smartly, almost violently.

The two men heard the sound; and one, unnoticed by Joan, came from the shop, to which her back was turned, and stood watching and listening.

Dick gave one cry, that caught up all his breath, and then paused with his mouth wide open and his head thrown back. Joan, now full of remorse, drew him to her, and kissed the hurt arm, trembling at the thoughts of the outcry that would come with his breath.

Dick's breath did come in good time, and with it, not

the expected screams, but a peal of fresh, bubbling laughter while his eyes smiled up at her through their tears, with a look that said,—

“ You cannot cheat me ; I knew 'twas fun.”

Tears streamed from Joan's eyes. She bent over him with a gaze of passionate love and awe.

“ Thou blessed little child !” sobbed she aloud. “ Sure thou did'st share thy mother's heavenly birth ere thou wast born to us, for thou art an angel, and I unworthy of serving thee.”

“ Nay, Joan ; 'tis we who are unworthy of being served by thee,” said a sad voice.

Joan rose up and turned towards Humphrey with the child in her arms, half covered with the golden curtain he had pulled about them.

The boy was heavy for her unaccustomed arms, and she put her foot on the rail of the chair, and partly rested him on her knee as she stood.

“ Humphrey, I struck your child. Canst forgive me.”

“ How can I do other than forgive you, my poor

lass, when I know you did it in the sharpness of your sorrow?"

"But 'twas a wicked sorrow, Humphrey."

"'Twas of my bringing."

"No."

"No, Joan? Ay, I remember last night you said 'twas you had cheated yourself; but I know that, had I been less blind in my self-conceit, I should have rightly understood your reason for listening kindly to me, a stranger; but be that as it may, I trust to God you will find comfort here in time."

Joan hung her head and wept.

"Oh, Joan, I try not to look back, but how can I see you and not look back to the time that ended but yesterday, though it seems so long ago? Dost remember, lass, what didst think the best colours of all the pleasant harvest—the wheat and poppy and corncockle a-growing together? Thy face, my Joan, has caught all three—thy eyes the blue o' the corncockle, thy lips the poppy's red, and thy hair the ripe wheat's yellow. How, then, can I look at thee and not remember how happy we were a-

journeying together, and not say to myself, ‘Sure my sweet fellow-traveller loved me and I her?’”

Here Dick’s hand and another’s held up the golden curtain, and Arkdale, stealing in, found himself in a prison of shimmering gold and soft arms.

“Sweetheart, when would you think me truest? speaking yesternight, when I was sick and sore with disappointment, and weary with travel, or now,—now that I am no longer weary or disappointed? Now that I hold thee and Dick in my arms, and feel myself more blessed than any woman on the earth?”

“If this is being false, Joan, never be true again.”

“’Tis being true to tell you I was false last night in letting you believe I came away with you for anything but liking for you, Humphrey. I think I loved you sooner than you me.”

Humphrey said that was not true, but as pleasant a falsehood as he had ever heard.

Joan laboured all day with a stout and loving heart, and chatted and sang cheerily to Dick, who now preferred her company to that of his father and Jenkyns. She watched

Arkdale, at first with anxiety, then with pride, as he threw himself into the business of the day—and, as he told Joan, a great day's business it was.

The news of his return had spread, and there came hurrying to his humble shop quite a crowd of persons on various errands apart from shaving and hair-dressing. About a dozen huge silver watches were received by Joan, into the interior, then came a few old clocks, and on inquiring of Jenkyns what these might mean, she was told that his master was the only man in town to whom several of the tradesmen of Bolton, and, indeed, more than one of the neighbouring gentry, would trust the setting right of their watches or clocks.

One person who came mysteriously, requesting to see Arkdale alone, was so unceremoniously dispatched, that Joan ventured to remonstrate with her husband, telling him that Jenkyns had heard from some boys that the visitor had arrived in the town in a very neat cart, now put up at the "Royal George."

"Be at ease, my Joan," answered the barber. "I know the fellow; he has come to bargain with me for the secret

of my new hair-dye, which I do not part with to the king's own wig-maker yet awhile."

Then came a country barber on a brown nag, which was held at the top of the steps by Jenkyns for full half-an-hour, to the great mortification of Arkdale's rival, Pritchard. This person merely came to beg for information concerning a certain new invention said to be in use in France—a little lathering-brush to use instead of the hand in shaving, and supposed to be in Arkdale's possession.

"Now, why," asked Joan, as the owner of the brown nag hustled out, taking a paper containing all the information he had wanted with him, and leaving something out of his stout leathern purse on Arkdale's table—"now, why do you satisfy this one more than he who puts up at the inn like a gentleman?"

"Put it to my good nature, Joan," answered he, locking up the money.

"Nay," said Joan, "remember I have known what it is to bargain with thee."

"Then, cunning one, put it to my happening to know

that a man will be in the town to-morrow with these brushes, if he arrive not to-day."

"Next time I want to sell my hair, I'll go to some one else, Dick," said Joan: "I am scarce a match for thy dad!"

"Yet, for all that, she drove me from twelve to fifteen Dick."

"And gave it him for nothing at last, my pretty Dick."

But all the rest of the day Joan watched him with smiling satisfaction, saying in her heart—"After all, in a great measure, he is right, whilst I am wrong. Of course, like all men, he goes into extremes; but I truly believe he is one to make a fortune. I am not for a Jack of all trades myself; but these are good, solid, profitable talents, which he has, that no one can gainsay."

Joan had said that she would not look forward again, and she remained true to her word; but though she kept her mind's eyes closed, she could not help feeling the glow of a bright future any more than one can help feeling the sunshine by shutting one's eyes.

Sometimes while she was engaged in unpacking and

finding places for the various items of her dowry, she would discover that, quite without her leave, her thoughts had gone through the cellar ceiling, and begun to furnish the first floor. Nay, sometimes, to her indignation, she found them in possession of the whole house, which bore before it an announcement that "Humphrey Arkdale was Hairdresser and Clockmaker to his Worship the Mayor," instead of the invitation, "Come to the Subterranean Barber."

When it was evening the three sat round the fire—Joan at her spinning-wheel, Jenkyns nursing Dick, and Humphrey enjoying his rest lazily, as it seemed to the others.

But Joan's busy eye soon detected something more than mere enjoyment of rest in the attitude of Humphrey's figure. Moving her head a little, so as to see into his face, she saw that his large, shrewd eyes, which seemed to be looking at the chestnuts Dick and Jenkyns were roasting in the ashes, were contracted with the expression of a man who, while a crowd of thoughts are floating through his mind, is trying determinedly to hold and analyse one.

Joan watched him, thinking to herself joyfully,—

"Was ever a man's heart so deep in his business?"

Suddenly he looked up, and said,—

"Sweetheart, didst ever use the spinning-jenny?"

Joan looked back at him with amazement, indignation, and reproach; looked, in fact, as she might have looked had he called her honesty into question.

"Well," said Arkdale, with a smile, "why look at me as I were mad? Hast used the thing, Joan, or not?"

"Never!" answered Joan vehemently; "never, Humphrey, as I hope for God's grace at my dying day."

For some minutes after, when Arkdale had turned away and fallen into another fit of thoughtfulness, Joan drew out her thread with a perplexed and offended look on her brow; but by-and-by she said to herself,—

"Now what folly in me to show such hastiness! Here he spoke to me for the sake of civility, out of his deep thought, and I must needs quarrel with his words, as if he could pick and choose them, and feign what he did not feel. He is not a woman."

He sat silent so long, that Joan began to grow jealous of the very thing she so much commended—business itself.

Bending her head so as to catch his eye, she said laughingly,—

“Come, a penny for thy thoughts.”

“A penny ! I want a fortune for them, Joan.”

“I’m the more wishful of hearing them.”

“Tell them to thee ?” Humphrey looked at her with a smile, and taking her busy hands, pushed her wheel away and drew her within one arm. “Tell *thee* my thoughts ? Why, as for that, I suppose, lass, I scarce can help myself ; and yet I hardly durst.”

“For why ?”

“My Joan, thee’st of a tribe who, did they but know what thou wantest to know, were as like to tear thy husband limb from limb as look at him. Thee didst get thy bread by the same trade as the poor mad lasses hereabouts, who set their lads to hunt and murder Hargreaves—poor Hargreaves, of the spinning-jenny, my mention whereof did turn thee white. Nay, Joan, be not hurt ; I know well *thy* heart is too tender to have pleasure in such doings ; and I know that, for my sake, thee’lt look at these things from the other side now.”

Joan did not answer, but, after remaining still and almost breathless for a minute, put his arm from her, rose, and stood by the fire, whose light showed her cheek had lost some of its colour.

"What was that?" said she, turning suddenly upon him, with voice and eyes full of alarm and entreaty. "Not *my husband* speaking kindly—pityingly, a'most—of the wretch who tried to take the bread out o' the mouths of us poor girls? *Poor Hargreaves!* did I hear? He has a harder name in our part!"

"He has an honoured name in this poor home of mine and thine, Joan; and, should he ever set foot in it, will be made welcome."

"If he ever eats bread of mine, may that bread poison me," said Joan, all her superstition and passionate love for her class aroused.

"Yet, Joan, thy husband is the worser man of the two."

"As how? Hath *he* been at any such sorry business?"

Arkdale remained silent a moment, with his knee on

the chair, his arms folded, and eyes fixed on the floor. Joan's eyes were on his face, with a look of sharp suspicion.

"Joan," said he, presently, in a measured, patient voice, that touched Joan's heart even while it roused her suspicions more and more, "there are men—men I have known and spoken with—gifted with minds far-sighted and ready speech, who could show you how the very thing you so much fear and loathe—you and those I have taken you from amongst—is to be as much for your good as for the good of others."

"Do I want a wise man like you, Humphrey, to tell me there are liars and hypocrites in the world?"

"Such men there are," he said, as if he had not heard her, "and honest and true men. But for myself, Joan, I can only tell you that what I do and yet hope to do, I do and hope to do from a conviction it is good, and should be done; and, moreover, will be done by those who come after me, if not done by me. This I say, and that I speak truth God knows; and this is all I can say in justification of myself to you."

"Then say out—say out, Humphrey. Do not spare me ! You are what they call an inventor."

"I hope to deserve that name."

"Oh, I have no doubt you do already ! But as to the justification you spoke of—may I ask what justified your marrying me, a spinner, whose hatred for such doings as yours you must well know ? "

"That very fact should give you better thoughts of me, Joan. How could I have any intent to injure those amongst whom I found a wife so dear and kind of heart as thee ? "

Joan stood with her face turned away ; her eyes were on the door. She felt just then as terrified and helpless as a lamb who finds itself treacherously lured into the home of the wolf, by whom her flock has been worried. In those days, thieves, executioners, and resurrectionists were scarcely thought more vile, by those of Joan's class and calling, than inventors. Joan knew a girl who had walked forty miles to see a woman whose son had thrown a cleaver at Hargreaves, and the journey had been spoken of ever since as a sort of holy pilgrimage.

"And they will hear, some day, that Joan Merryweather is the wife of a man worse than Hargreaves. Oh, how have I been cheated!"

Tears and fire filled her eyes as she lifted her head and looked at her husband. A voice whispered her, "Leave him—be true to thy people; leave him—defy him!" But all Joan's horror at her position, and all her abhorrence of the inventor, could not blind her to the fact of her love for the man who stood watching her struggle with firm, tender patience. Her face fell into her hands. Both things seemed so utterly impossible—to live with an inventor; to leave Arkdale. In the midst of her anguish a thought came, which had a magical effect on her. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes became bright and tender, her form erect.

Arkdale saw the change.

"My Joan," said he, "thy love has outlived this shock. I knew it would."

Joan met him coming, and fell upon his neck, crying,—
"Ay, love, thou knewest it would, although my heart
should break."

"That will not be, my Joan—thou art too brave a woman for heart-breaking; and I knew it, and scorned to deceive thee, as I might have done a poor, weak, hare-brained lass."

"'Twas hard for me, you know, Humphrey," said Joan, lifting her face and looking into his with the sweetest, pardon-begging glance; "but you do forgive me?"

"I guessed thy heart, and forgave it beforehand."

"Jenkyns," cried Joan, suddenly, "what were thy eyes made for—to look what thou art doing, or to stare at thy master! But come, lad," she added, smiling, and speaking in a soft, joyous tone, which made Jenkyns start again, "Dick is a burthen, though one of love; but your arms are already a'most weary, I should say. Let me lay him in his bed, that you may eat your supper in peace."

"Thee ought to think thyself mighty well off, Jenkyns," said Arkdale, as Joan took the child to the inner chamber, "to have so kind a mistress."

"But I thought myself better off still 'fore I had e'er a one," answered bluff Jenkyns.

"Ungrateful rascal!"

Jenkyns shrugged his shoulders.

Joan came back with her scarlet wedding-knot pinned on her neckerchief.

"Look," said she to her husband, smiling brightly, and pointing to it; then added to Jenkyns, patronisingly, "this is my wedding-knot, Jenkyns. I have put it on in honour of my first supper at home. We will have the pasty I put by for to-morrow, and I tell thee, without thy master's leave, thou shalt have something better than ale to drink my health in."

"Thank'ee, missus," said Jenkyns; "I'm agreeable."

They had quite a little feast; and Joan was so gay and gentle, and showed such modest, tender coquetry, that Arkdale could scarce believe it was the cold, precise Joan Merryweather, with whom he had bargained at the fair.

Now and then, perhaps, a less enraptured observer than Arkdale, or a less careless one than Jenkyns, might have wondered at the intense eagerness of Joan to look and say her best that night. It was as if she had a dangerous rival at the table, and love and jealousy were teaching her all the arts and witcheries of a finished coquette.

When Jenkyns was gone, and the place all closed once more, Arkdale said,—

“Joan, thee hast not seen Dick’s uncle yet; wilt come with me now to look in upon him ? ”

“Dick’s uncle, Humphrey ? ”

“Ay. Not his good-for-nought uncle Paul, mind you, but the rich old fellow from whom Dick expects a fortune fit for a prince.”

“Now, of a truth you never told me this before,” said Joan. “You laugh at me, Humphrey. You mean—— Ah, I know what you mean ! ”

“Well, will you come ? ”

“Yes, if I shall not be afraid. Pray, do you work by the light o’ blue fire ? ”

And Joan shivered as she laughed, and locked her hands on his arm.

A heavy wooden bench was placed before an opening near the chimney-place, and covered with old carpet to the floor. Humphrey moved the bench away, and, entering the cobwebbed recess, laid his hand on a rough, ungainly-looking thing, and turned to Joan with a smile.

Holding her hand to the candle, so as to throw the light into the recess, and so as to leave her face in shade, Joan looked with much the same loathing as that with which a prisoner of war might look upon the arms he is bidden to take up against his own countrymen. She thought Arkdale would hear her heart beat while she was trying to summon courage and quietness to look up in answer to his look, which she felt upon her face.

At last she raised her eyes, smiled faintly, and nodded.

"What think you of him?" asked Arkdale.

"Since Dick is his heir, I dare not offend him," answered she; "otherwise I should say I cannot praise his beauty."

"Well, by the mass, I must own he is *not* so comely as some spinners," said Arkdale, looking at his bright-haired wife.

"What a frightful thing for a woman to have in her house-place!" said Joan.

"A woman has nothing to do with it; it is to be worked by a horse."

"A horse, good lack!" and Joan fell into a fit of laugh-

ing. "Your pardon, dear heart; but indeed, Humphrey, a horse! Fancy thy daughter, shouldst thee ever have one, when asked who spun her linen, 'stead of saying, with a little pride, as I can say, 'My mother,' must needs answer, 'Twas Farmer so-and-so's mare, or wall-eyed Dobbin, lying dead now at the knacker's!' Oh, you would make a woman no woman at all. A horse to spin! Mercy on us, what next?"

"Are you laughing or crying?"

"Forgive me, I am trying to do neither."

"And so art doing both with all thy might. My lass, thee'ret weary. I had much to tell thee about my labours here, but it shall be at' another time."

"Ay, at another time," said Joan, wiping her eyes with her apron. "Why are you getting it out?" and she shrank back a little, as Humphrey pushed the model from its corner.

"Because I must be up and at it betimes in the morning," answered he. "Dick's uncle has been too long neglected already. He will be for leaving Dick a beggar after all, if he is not properly cared for."

"I reckon Dick, and all belonging to him, will be beggars, if he is too much cared for. Why, what an ado there is here, and all to make trumpery weft! for I have heard that none of these things can turn out warp."

"As yet they have not," said Arkdale; "but this is for weft and warp too, my Joan."

Joan was silent. Arkdale looked at her and smiled, thinking she was incredulous.

"Thee'ret thinking, if such is to be done, Joan, thy husband is not the man to do it."

Joan raised her eyes, grave and tearful, to his face, and shook her head.

"I was not thinking that—but a sadder thought."

"What was it, lass?"

"That there is less harm in a fool's folly than a wise man's. When *he* turns his hand to mischief, what ruin can he make!"

"My Joain, thy voice is but a whisper of that which I shall have howling in my ears in a little time. Forgive me if I can hear thee and smile, feeling assured, as I do, that I shall presently make thee of one mind with myself."

Joan's lips murmured something inaudibly which was not "Amen."

"Come, now, sweetheart," said Arkdale, taking her hands, "we have learnt to know each other much better to-day. I propose we make such knowledge suffice, and try one another no further. If we cannot always exactly understand one another, let us take for granted that that we do not understand is good, and believe in no evil—thou of me, or I of thee. My chief thought is for thy happiness, my next for Dick's; and all my hopes for both are set here," and he laid his hands on the machine. "Come, then, thou canst not love thy husband and despise his labour. Give me thy hand over it, lass. There, now let us trust our love may overreach every difficulty that comes betwixt us in this life, as our arms reach over this—*thy* present difficulty."

"Amen," said Joan; "Amen!"

It was two hours after this. The fire was fast dying on the barber's hearth, and gave out light by gasps. The crickets, like jovial heirs, came noisily taking possession.

The barber's full, strong breathings could be heard through the closed door.

Towards the end of the second hour there was a moment when the jubilee on the hearth was stopped, and the breathings grew louder. The chamber-door had been opened. It was closed again, and a form, bare-footed, golden-haired, went past the hearth, and stood before the ungainly thing whose huge shadow came and faded and again came and faded, on the discoloured wall.

Joan's fever-brightened eyes had never closed that night ; her heart—whose throbs kept the pale hair that streamed down over arm and bosom in glistening motion—had known no minute's rest. Her ears those two long hours had heard nothing but the harsh clamour of old women's tongues uttering threats of vengeance against such men as he who slept beside her.

She stood still by the machine, looking at it.

The crickets grew bold at her silence, and chirped loudly as before.

For Joan there was no silence, no solitude. Something she saw and heard, which made her stiffen and draw

back, and at last, when she had remained thus staring at the darkness, her face suddenly grew white, she flung out her arms with a cry that died away to a whisper as it reached her lips.

“Nay, nay, good dames, good wenches, I will be true to thee ! I will be true !”

Her eyes wandered from end to end of the dreary cellar, and grew less wild as the fire sent a glow over it, and for one instant drove off the shadowy crowds.

Then with a quieter, more intense passion in them, the eyes again were turned to the machine. She laid her hand on it—her white lips moved silently, and the huge shadow of the machine model came and faded, and faded and came on the discoloured wall.

“Thou art very still; 'tis but thy body here—thy soul lies with *him*, whispering mischief. My love, so wise, so good ! What dost thou with him ? He is possessed with thee, thou devil, and I will tear thee out ! I will tear thee from his heart, I tell thee—or leave thee master there, and go away and die ! From this night it is strife unto death betwixt us !” Which shall conquer ?

It is a bitter evening in December, close upon Christmas time, and Humphrey Arkdale, his wife, and 'prentice sit round the cellar fire listening to the waits.

Humphrey keeps time to the music by jingling some halfpence he has ready in his hand for the singers. He leans back in his oak elbow-chair, his head thrown to one side, his lips repeating softly the words of the carol, while his eyes look towards Joan with a light in them, and an expression of thankful, almost ecstatic hope, such as might be in the eyes of a belated traveller who, after being beset with terrors all the long dark night, begins at last to see the dawn.

Jenkyns, waving the stick with which he is stirring a new dye over the fire, turns half round towards his master, his pale face beaming with sympathy and exultant pride.

Joan also smiles as she leans over her work, with hands clasped in reverence to the sacred words, but there is neither joy nor peace in her smile ; the lips wreath, and there only is the smile. The eyes, downcast, dry, and bright, seem at times to have no expression in them but one of apathy or heavy stupor.

But now and then, as a drunken man goes reeling home from the "George," and gives a derisive shout or groan in passing Humphrey's door, there flashes something in Joan's eyes like lightning over a leaden sky, and her hands clasp one another more tightly.

Sometimes the shouts or groans are accompanied by words which make Arkdale's cheek flush. Sometimes it is his own name—sometimes the word "inventor," coupled with some not very flattering epithets.

"Shout away, my lads," he says softly. "By the mass, Joan, they make me feel a'most a great man already!"

Joan looked up with a cold, wondering glance.

"Do not jest, I pray you," said she.

"And do not you, Joan," answered Humphrey, "take these things so much to heart. *I* shall brave the storm; don't be afraid for me."

Joan's lips moved slightly, as if mutely and half contemptuously, answering,—

"For *you*!"

Then, with an impatient hand, she snatched her work up, and stitched with a vehemence that made the sharp

click of her needle audible to her little stepson in his crib, and he smiled at the sound and kissed her cloak that covered him, for he knew it was his garment she was stitching.

Joan, as if the caress had reached her heart, rose and went towards the crib, knelt down, and laid her head against it.

She heard Arkdale go to the door as the waits ceased—heard him give them money, and wish them a merry Christmas; then the door closed, and, glancing sharply round, Joan saw that Humphrey had gone out.

Her face turned a shade more pale, and it was evident that the contempt she had felt a few moments before as to his safety, was replaced by most painful anxiety.

“Jenkyns,” said she, rising and pushing back her hair, which Dick’s fond little hand had pulled about her face, “surely ‘tis scarce safe for your master to go abroad to-night; he’s best within doors, when he’s made Bolton streets what they are.”

Jenkyns was busy preparing bottles for his dye, which he had set on the stones to cool. As he could not answer his

mistress reassuringly, being very anxious himself, he judged it best to pretend to be too much occupied to answer at all.

Joan went to the door and drew the bolt.

"Do you know where your master has gone, Jenkyns?"

"Eh?"

Joan repeated her question.

"To get some o' Boodle's men to go along with us to-morrow."

As he spoke he jerked his head in the direction of a large long shaped object, covered up near the wall.

Joan, who was passing close by this as Jenkyns spoke, shivered and drew her skirt close to her, that it might not touch it, but stood still and stared at it, as if her eyes were charmed to the spot.

Jenkyns looked at her and shrugged his shoulders.

"Come, mistress," said he, coaxingly, as he bit a cork to make it the right size for the bottle he held, "let it alone. It's like burnt porridge, you know—the more you look at it and smell it, the more it'll set you agen it. Come, leave it bide—leave it bide."

She came back listlessly to her seat by the fire, but her

blue eyes, full of weary yet restless passion, were drawn incessantly, as by a loathsome fascination, to the same object.

"Tell me, Jenkyns," cried she, suddenly throwing down her work—"tell me, am I asleep and dreaming, or is this all true? Do I hear my husband called such names as I and mine called Hargreaves? Has one of those vile things—those destroyers of the poor—been made under the same roof with me—at this fireside, where I dare sometimes to be happy? Has it been made here, I say, by the hands that give me my daily bread—the hands that put this ring upon my finger? Oh! Jenkyns, am I dreaming, lad?—oh, am I dreaming? or is this true, true, true? and does *it* stand there finished—finished for its work?"

And she rose and stood looking at it, with her palms pressed to her temples.

"Finished, sure enough," muttered Jenkyns, adjusting his funnel in the bottle, "and a good job, too, I should say. If it had been about much longer, we should a' stood a chance of havin' our very limbs worked into it, as well as the saucepans and brooms."

Joan threw herself in the chair by the table, and laid her head on her arms.

"Jenkyns," said she in a low, half-stifled voice, "I feel as if to-morrow would never come, or as if I should never live to see it. 'Tis bad enough to have had the thing here, growing and growing into life all this weary time; but oh! to see it dragged out into the light o' day—out before their savage eyes, in reach of their hands. They will tear thy master to pieces, Jenkyns. I know their poor desperate hearts, and oh, lad, they will—they will!"

"Come, come, mistress," said Jenkyns, "you mustn't be afeard if we ain't."

"But I am; and, 'tween that and shame, my heart is a'most broken. I would he were in now—I would he were in!"

"Why, you'd do nought but rail at him if he was," asserted Jenkyns consolingly.

Joan did not answer, but sat looking into the fire with her hands clasped in her lap.

Dick's quiet breathing, the sharp crackling of the logs, and the noise of the dye trickling through the funnel into

the bottles, were the only sounds to be heard now, for the occasional tramp of feet on the crisp snow without had ceased, and Joan waited in vain for the footstep she knew so well.

Sitting there in the gloom and firelight, her mind was busy with two trains of thought—heart-wearing anxiety for Humphrey's return, and a bitter looking back over the last year at the gradual and certain victory of her wood and iron rival, whose power over Arkdale's mind she had struggled against till all her patience and peace of mind were exhausted. And now it stood there finished, silent, but full of terrible life and power. To-morrow it was to be exhibited in the town, where a tradesmen had been bold enough to promise to lend his workshop for the purpose, for which kindness he had had already several windows broken by missiles from unseen hands.

"To see it so trim and ship-shape, now," said Jenkyns, looking admiringly towards it, as he tapped the funnel before taking it from the bottle, "one 'ud hardly credit the shifts as has been made for it. I wonder there's a stick left in the place. D'ye remember when you found the sock

you'd been a-knittin' for Dick nigh all undone, and the worsted gone? Says you, 'Prithee, Jenkyns, is this thy handiwork?' and master, he looks up from his books, and says, 'Ah, Joan, woman,' says he, 'thereby hangs a tale that will amuse thee! I was in sudden need of worsted to put about the whirl o' my bobbins, and finding the thread o' thy knitting give way as I pulled it, I took enough for to answer my purpose for that present,' says he; and, says you, 'That's all the world like you, Arkdale; you'd cover up your whirligigs though your child's feet went bare for it.'"

Joan remembered this well enough, and remembered many and many another such incident in connection with the machine's progress.

Part of her wedding dowry had consisted of an old but strong set of harness, which, from some freak or other, she had begged Farmer Bristow to give her. Perhaps it was because she had a secret ambition to keep a cart and horse such as her father and mother kept for driving to market in, when the farm belonged to them; or it might have been simply a desire to keep it as a remembrance of *that*

cart and horse, and those happy drives. However, she persuaded the farmer to let her take it away, and then kept it hanging on the cellar wall at Bolton, in such trim condition, that the loan of it had many a time been begged by neighbours going on a business or pleasure excursion some miles beyond the town.

One day it chanced that Joan herself had need of it. Some friends in Cambridge had sent her word that she must certainly go and hear a wonderfully eloquent preacher named Wesley, who was shortly to preach at a place not very far from her present home. As Arkdale could not leave home, Jenkyns was to accompany her. A horse was lent by Simon Blutcher, of the "George," a cart by another neighbour, and early in the morning, as Joan was equipping herself for the journey, Humphrey came in excitedly from the shop to say that Bowden had sent quite a genteel cart, and Blutcher his own fat cob, but that neither had sent any harness.

"Why, I suppose not," said Joan merrily, "when all the town knows we have as good a set—though I say it who should not—as any one between the toll-gate and the 'George.'"



Here Jenkyns exchanged a look with his master, and slunk away, vigorously combing his hair over his eyes.

"Ours!" said Arkdale, colouring a little. "Why, is it possible thee hast never missed it?"

"Missed it," echoed Joan, turning sharply to the corner where it had been used to hang. "Why, surely—yes, it is gone!"

"And Jenkyns never told thee that he changed it away for me for a broad band of leather which now goes round my drum or wheel, and moves the whole machine?"

Joan said not a word, but burst into tears, sent away the cart and the fat cob, boxed Jenkyns' ears, and sat down to her spinning.

Arkdale, knowing how much her heart had been set on going to hear Mr. Wesley preach, got a comfortable conveyance for her, and made her go the next day along with some neighbours.

The great preacher did not send her empty away. She came home with her anxious, heavy heart much comforted and strengthened. She met Arkdale coming out as she went in, and thanked him sweetly for having been the

means of giving her such deep pleasure. The place was in sad disorder, and looking for the broom with which to sweep her floor, she discovered that the handle was gone.

"What means this?" asked she of Jenkyns. "What art laughing at, blockhead?" and all the bright, sweet look of peace was burned out of her eyes by one angry flash.

"Who could help laughing," answered Jenkyns, "to see your broomstick stuck on master's drumwheel, and the little cog-wheel cocked o' the top of it. Do come and look, mistress."

"A plague on ye," cried Joan, weeping. "I would that broomstick, drum-wheel, and cog-wheel, cylinders, flyers, spindles, bobbins, and whirligigs, were down thy master's throat, and thee after them!"

The appetite of the extortionate idol went on increasing, and still increasing. At last there came a time when chair-rails, stool-legs, bed-posts, and wire toasting-forks no longer satisfied it. Nothing but money seemed to appease its terrible hunger now. It devoured the few pounds put by in the coffee-biggin against a rainy day; devoured the

money put by for Humphrey's new clothes. Even the contents of little Dick's cardboard money-box were not spared by it. Every penny earned in the business, and which was not instantly secured by Joan's careful and jealous hand, was devoured by the terrible monster, and no more seen.

Joan saw the increasing poverty of the place, and heard the discordant groans and wrenches and whirring of the giant struggling into life, and suffering with a quiet but intense pain that now never left her for a moment. Even her sleep was disturbed by hideous dreams, from which she often started shrieking like one in a fit.

Sometimes a mysterious visitor or two would be admitted by Arkdale into the monster's presence, but this was very seldom, fortunately for Joan, since, from the jingling sound at the door as Arkdale let them out, it was evident the creature had smitten its visitors with its own money-hunger, which Arkdale was obliged to satisfy in return for a few mysterious articles which looked to Joan like emblems of the black art, and which had names as mysterious as their appearance.

Arkdale rested not in his secret and loving labour till

every resource was drained; and then, as he sat idly of an evening looking moodily into the fire, Joan suffered almost as much at the sight of his sad and careworn face, as she had done when he and Jenkyns whistled over their work in the recess, leaving the lonely fireside to herself.

It was on Christmas Eve, a year before the evening when Arkdale and his family sat round the fire listening to the waits, that Joan, on putting little Dick to bed, bade him hang up his stocking, as Santa Claus came by that night, and might, if Dick had been good throughout the year, drop into it whatever he most wished for.

"And hang up daddy's, too," said Dick, and had his way; for the big and little stocking were pinned up side by side near the opening in the curtain, that Santa Claus might find them ready to his hand as he entered.

The next morning Dame Arkdale and Jenkyns were about betimes, decorating the room and plucking a lean old hen which a rich neighbour had kindly sent them for their Christmas dinner.

They were interrupted in their occupations by the appearance of an early and unusual visitor—the post-boy.

Humphrey and his little son slept late.

"Come," cried Joan, merrily, "fie on thee, sluggards! Santa Claus will be for taking away again what he has given thee."

They both woke. Dick sprang out and seized the stockings, and Humphrey was surprised to see something bulging the leg of his as well as Dick's.

"Now, this is some trick of thy mother's," said he, drawing it out. "What, a letter! and from thy uncle Paul! Come, Joan, woman—come and hear the news."

He tore it open, then seized upon something inclosed in it, and gazed at it with moistening eyes.

"What is that?" asked Joan, bending down to look at it.

"My darlings," replied Arkdale, putting an arm round each of them, "your trials are at an end. Our fortunes are made. Paul sends me fifty pounds."

All these things came before Joan's mind as she sat, that second Christmas of her marriage, waiting for Humphrey's return.

Three clocks, which the barber had had to mend, and

which now hung ticking on the wall, waiting to be called for by their owners, all struck ten at once. Joan began to droop lower and lower over the fire, and Jenkyns to yawn vigorously, for it was past his time for retiring to bed at the cobbler's.

At last Joan's eyes turned slowly from the fire to the door, but not for a minute afterwards did Jenkyns hear a脚步; and it was yet another minute ere he recognised it as his master's, and rose to open the door.

As soon as Arkdale came in, he turned and barred the door again. Without glancing directly towards him, Joan could see that he and Jenkyns looked at each other significantly, and that Arkdale touched his right shoulder, and made a wry face. Then he came to the fireside, flushed but smiling.

"Well, I've secured four of Boodle's best men for tomorrow morning," said he. "And now, Jenkyns, be off, for I shall look for thy ugly phiz right early."

"Get your supper first, lad," commanded his mistress, setting a plate of porridge before him.

"Do they seem pretty quietish there now?" asked

Jenkyns, in a whisper, indicating with his porridge-spoon the "Royal George."

On the pretence of reaching the ale-jug, Humphrey leaned across and answered, in a low voice,—

"Quiet! Yes; and I saw a score of hands shaking over the bench,—some compact had just been made between them."

"Peaceable?"

"Very, my lad, judging by the grips of the hand they gave one another, and the growls."

Joan gave a sharp, short sigh, and turned to the fire.

Arkdale looked at her anxiously, and shook his head sadly at Jenkyns, to warn him to silence. Tossing off his ale hastily, he drew his chair close to Joan's, and took her hand.

"Come, lass," he said tenderly, "times are on the turn for thee now; thee'l be a carriage lady ere thee know'st well where thee art. And with thy silks and gewgaws to set thee off, I shall have a pack of fine gallants casting sheep's eyes at thee, and wondering where the

deuce I could have picked up such a wife in my beggarly days."

"As for my carriage and gewgaws," said Joan, "if I can have a pair of stout shoes, to keep my feet dry when I go for the water, I shall be only too thankful."

"But indeed, Joan," persisted her husband, gently, "that such a change will come to us I am as confident as a man can well be; and I do think it beseems thee, as well as me, to look forward and grow accustomed to the prospect, or where wilt thou be when it comes upon thee?"

"Next week is prospect enough for me," said Joan; "and a dreary prospect, too, with no money to meet it with, and all the town against us."

"Then there is Dick. He should assuredly be got over certain habits of his which will, in our new life, be constantly bringing the old life to the unpleasant remembrance of ourselves and others."

"At present I have as much as ever I can do to get him over the disappointment of not having a new coat,

instead of this patched one, to go to school in," answered Joan, holding up the coat for Arkdale to view.

Arkdale ceased speaking to her, and set himself to studying his speech for to-morrow. Joan went on with her mending. Jenkyns wished his master and mistress good night, and went out.

He had scarcely been gone time enough to ascend the area steps when a confused noise was heard—a noise which made Arkdale and Joan start, and turn their eyes towards the door. Humphrey rose and reached down his hat.

"Fools!" he muttered; "would they dare lay hands on the poor lad?"

Arkdale went out. Joan went to the door and listened. A crowd had just issued from the "George." One man with his bleared, uncertain eyes, had espied Jenkyns, and begun to hoot him, and Arkdale found all the rest following his example, and making a stoppage in the road.

"Hi, mates, hi! here's th' wizard's 'prentice!"

"Yes, my boys, and here's his master," shouted Arkdale. "Come, a free passage for the lad, and consult me if yo'

want anything. I manage my own business myself, as everybody knows."

"An' a black business, too! Look at his hands, mates,—look at his hands!"

This was directed at poor Jenkyns, whose hands were much stained with the dye. A volley of howls followed, in which the words, "wizard," "inventor," and the "Broomhill pond," were mixed confusedly.

"Inventor! Yes, my lads," said Arkdale, "and I'll show you an invention presently that shall disperse ye a little quicker than ye came,—something of a horsewhip shape 'tis."

There was another prolonged yell at this, and then a hurrying of feet from every street and alley within earshot.

Arkdale felt a touch on his arm. It was Joan.

"Come in, for pity's sake," said she. "Are you mad, to anger the poor wretches you have wro—— I mean, try, Humphrey—try and pacify them. Give 'em some o' the fine reasoning you give me, that keeps me quiet, spite of every beat of my heart telling me 'tis wrong.

Say something, only pacify them, for the poor wives' sakes."

"Reason with them!" said Arkdale, turning upon her almost fiercely. "Have I not reasoned with them—the thick-headed sots? Haven't I met them whenever and wherever I could—in my own home and in their homes—and talked and reasoned with them? I'll reason with them in another way now."

Joan had never seen such passion burst from him before. She clung to his arm, and turned a weak, piteous face to the crowd.

"There, get thee in," said he more kindly—"get thee in; and, Jenkyns, lad, go thou with thy mistress and keep the place safe."

"And you, master?" asked Jenkyns.

"And you, dear Humphrey?" sobbed Joan.

"I'm off to George Pretts; he and Thompson offered to come to-night in case of a row. I don't care for 'em myself, not I; but who knows, perhaps the thing's not safe with such a pack as this round the house."

"Don't go through 'em, Humphrey," said Joan, draw-

ing him towards the steps; "go round the back way. You can get over the wall; can't he, Jenkyns?"

For the safety of his precious model, Humphrey yielded to this proposition. Hurrying in, he helped Jenkyns make the door fast, and ran out to seek the steps that led up to the back yard.

Before he went, however, there occurred a little incident which Joan never forgot to her dying hour.

Just as he was going out by the door leading to the steps, he paused an instant, and, with a glance at his wife and Jenkyns, threw out his arm with a strong impressive gesture in the direction of the machine.

Neither had time to answer the look or movement. He was gone, and the two were left alone.

As they stood taking breath after all the hurry and affright, a stone came against the window, smashing the glass and striking violently upon the shutter.

Little Dick sat up in bed, put a fist in each eye, and began to roar.

Another stone came crashing down on the window, and then came a volley on both window and door.

Jenkyns flushed and shook his fist. Joan turned as white as her neckerchief.

Jenkyns looked distracted as his eye fell upon her.

"Oh, come now," said he, seizing her arm roughly and drawing her towards a chair. "Don't let's have none o' that, or I dunno what I *shall* do. There's never a rumpus of no kind but what you wemmen must go and make it worse by a-goin' as white as biled cod or screechin' like a hayhena. Stow it now, missis, *do* stow it," cried he, beseechingly, as another shower of stones clattered down, and Joan's face grew more and more rigid.

He began to chafe her hands, saying,—

"There, there, now don't be afeard. *It's* all safe enough. *They* couldn't get in if they was to all bear upon the door at once; not they."

"Let me alone, Jenkyns," said she, clenching her cold hands, and letting them fall heavily in her lap; "I'm not afeard."

At that moment there came a knocking at the inner door, and before Jenkyns could get to open it, the mis-



tress of the house, a poor widow, came in, looking nearly as white as Joan.

"Mercy save us, Dame Arkdale!" cried she. "Oh dear, oh dear! what have you brought upon me! A lone widder, and the lads away on their Christmas outing, and the house unprotected by so much as the cat, that was pizoned last week with licking the new dye your husband invented. Oh, oh! I'm ready to drop. Hark to 'em! hark to 'em! Oh, we shall be murdered in our beds!"

"Not you," growled Jenkyns. "There's no such good luck as you taking yourself off there!"

The widow threw herself into a chair, and began to rock to and fro and weep and moan dismally, which sound made Dick break out with redoubled vigour.

Down came the stones. The widow shrieked. Jenkyns jumped on a bench and reached down his master's old pistol. Joan sat motionless, her face like marble, her eyes large and glittering, and a little raised, as if she listened to some voice speaking to her.

At last she made a sign with her hand to Jenkyns. He came.

"Make that woman go away," she said, under her breath.

"Come, mum," said Jenkyns, shaking the widow, "you and me 'ud better come up and rekerniter—see the doors and windows is all fast and that—or we shall be having a surprise not over pleasin'. Come, *ac-cept* of my arm."

"I won't keep him long from ye, dame," sobbed the widow. "Oh, hark ; oh, hark !"

No sooner had they left Joan to herself than the face of stone grew suddenly human. Great tears came into her eyes, and, stretching out her arms towards the window, with a look of ineffable love and pity, she fell upon her knees.

"Oh, my poor souls ! Oh, my poor, poor souls ! My heart is broke for you !—my heart is broken in twain !"

She sobbed with passion, her cheek laid to the ground, and her hair, which she had clutched at till it fell, lying over the stones in front of her.

She lay there some minutes, while gradually the shower of stones ceased, and heavy feet came clattering down

the area steps, and fierce blows began to fall on the window and the door.

Little Dick had lain back on his pillow, pale and sick with fright.

Now Jenkyns, being a great friend of Dick's, and one in whom he had more confidence than in any one besides (except his father), the child was much grieved and alarmed at not hearing his voice for so long.

At last he mustered up courage to pull his little crib-curtain, and peep tearfully out into the great room, full of shadows and lights.

Then Dick saw a sight that filled his little heart with wonder and vague terror.

He saw, standing by his father's machine model, the cover of which was off, a woman, having in her hand a thing like that which his stepmother and Jenkyns used for chopping firewood. The woman was, it seemed to Dick, wondrously like his stepmother, yet wondrously unlike when he tried to persuade his fearful little heart that it was her. Her lips were parted over her teeth, yet she did not seem to be laughing. Her hair covered her

oulders, her eyes were so bright they made Dick's wink more than looking at the candle did.

Just above the machine there hung a picture of Holofernes lying asleep in his tent, and Judith looking at him.

Now as Dick raised his eyes to that, it struck him that the woman by his father's model was more like Judith in the picture than his stepmother. She looked down on the machine just as Judith looked down on Holofernes.

Dick had heard the story, and knew what Judith had done to Holofernes after looking at him like that, and his heart began to quake for what was going to happen to his father's cherished treasure.

Presently he stood erect by the crib, and in another instant, spite of the clamouring at the door and window, the bare, rosy feet pattered boldly across the room.

He took hold of the woman's skirts.

"Mammy, don't a-kill it."

She shrieked and started back, as if his touch had burned her.

"Ha! did thy mother send thee?" she moaned. "Are the very angels of heaven against me?"

Then suddenly and wildly she caught him up in one arm.

"Nay, they send thee to bear a part in saving thy father," she said; and, to the child's terror and amazement, she went to the besieged door, undid the fastenings, and flung it wide open.

"Back!" cried she, extending her hand palm outwards towards the fierce faces with a gesture at once commanding and piteous.

There was tier after tier of these furious faces all up the steps, and the area presented to Joan a sight from which at any other time she would have fled in wildest fear. But now she stood looking at them with a face on which blind prejudice and superstition looked as grand and tender as outraged justice.

Her eyes swam in tears of passionate pity, her lips quivered; her brave, determined attitude and gesture, in the face of a riotous mob, her earnestness, her passion, gave her for the moment all the beauty and grandeur of

true heroism. When she spoke, it was in a strange mixture of hoarse and strong and sweet shrill tones.

“Masters, a black work has been done in this house,—*it shall be undone*; but not by you, for to get ye thrown into gaol for rioting. Oh, not by you, but by this hand, masters! this hand, that should have crushed the black work at the beginning! I have been false to ye. I will make ye amends this night, and save *him* from the poor folks’ curse; for, masters, he has put all his heart and soul in this thing, and could never—no, never—make another, were this destroyed. And shall that not be? Ay, though it ruin me, though it kill me, to cut to pieces the work of a hand so dear. Look, gossips, look, masters, if I keep not the word I have passed you, then to your homes quickly and peaceably. Your poor wives are waiting for you, cursing me and mine, perhaps, for the thing that keeps you abroad and in danger. One look, then, to see me make good my word, then away, and good luck be with ye; and, masters, should ye see any from my part, I trust ye’ll speak a word for me, saying how, in the end, Joan Merryweather was true to her own poor working folk.”

The crowd of faces pressed closer together and nearer to the door, as Joan turned and snatched the cleaver Dick had seen in her hand as she stood under the picture of Holofernes and Judith.

At first the silence was almost unbroken; but at the first stroke on the hated machine, a low buzz of fierce satisfaction and expectation began and rose and deepened into an exultant roar, as the weak arm, bared to the shoulder for its work, struck and struck again with increasing vehemence and power.

With the beautiful child clinging to her shoulders, and her pale soft hair borne back from her face by the sharp gusts of wind, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes gleaming with excitement and fierce exertion, Joan appeared to the rioters like a fair and powerful angel come down to defend them.

Joan herself—though at first the severing of the strong and delicate workmanship had been like cutting at her own flesh and blood—began to feel a wild joy in her work, and a mad recklessness as to the misery that must follow.

All the bitter hatred for the *inventor*, which her love for her husband had made her hide in her own breast so long, found vent at that moment, and gave strange fire to her eye and strange strength to her arm. Every miserable moment this thing had cost her was remembered now and avenged.

But the moment drew nigh when this wondrous strength of Joan's was to leave her as it had come—suddenly. Her eye began to glaze, her hand to strike at random.

Even if this had not been perceived by the crowd at the door, it was hardly likely all could resist the temptation to help at such fascinating work. Just as Joan's hand grew unsteady, a powerful young fellow who had once felt the barber's heavy hand and had not forgotten its weight, tore up a loose paving-stone at the door, and rushing in, fell upon the remains of poor Arkdale's hand and brain labour of so many weary years with a fury that left it nothing but a heap of rubbish on the floor.

No sooner was this brave deed finished than the word was passed from mouth to mouth that Arkdale was coming. There was a fresh yell of triumph as the crowd

jostled each other, and rushed to the area steps and poured into the street.

The tidings of the destruction of the model was speedily passed on to those who had been too far off to hear and see what had taken place within the threshold of the inventor's door.

The increasing roar of voices kept Joan still inspired a moment or two with their joy and their exultation. Presently she heard Humphrey's firm foot leaping down the steps, and her heart seemed to stand still. Her yellow hair was still borne wide on either side of her by the wind ; her face was paling slowly from the crimson flush of passion to the hue of death ; her hand, holding the instrument of destruction, hung powerless by her side. She tried to grasp the child, but felt him slipping from her. Her eyes were staring fixedly at the doorway.

The well-known face came before her, and looked at her with eager and tender eyes.

"My wife ! thank Mercy you are safe."

He took the child from her, actually setting his foot on the ruins of his model without noticing them.

This tender anxiety for her, and forgetfulness of everything else, increased for Joan the anguish of the moment.

As he stooped to kiss her, a sound between a sob and a laugh came from her white lips, and she pointed down with one hand while she lifted the other to her eyes, and hid them.

Arkdale looked on the ground, and saw the rubbish without recognising more than enough to give him an uneasy thought, and send his quick glance darting about the room. His glance returned to the broken mass at his feet, and a flash of recognition came into his eyes.

“Hah!”

He staggered back with the sharpest cry of pain Joan had ever heard from a man, and sank down on the doorstep, pressing Dick fast in his arms and staring at his mangled treasure with brows drawn upward, and forehead full of lines.

Dick caressed him in childish terror at his strange looks ; and soon Humphrey began to return his caresses, sighing heavily, and kissing him and pressing him to his breast.

It was worse than gall to Joan to see him sit hugging

his boy in silence, and his staring eyes filling slowly with tears, the first she had ever seen there.

"Ay, Dick," said he, hoarsely, stretching out a hand that shook as with palsy, "there 'tis, my lad, all dust and ashes! Thy fortune—fit for a prince, boy—fit for a prince—dust and ashes! Thy mother's home—our home, where we were to make up to her for all she has suffered and wanted in this—ah, such a place, lad, thee'st never seen the like—there 'tis, Dick, dust and ashes! Her carriage, her fine friends—my lords and my ladies—she'd have shined amongst 'em, Dick, no fear o' that—her servants, her charity-money that was to be spent like water on the poor folks she loves, there—there, all dust and ashes! The means of glorious prosperity thy dad was to leave his country, all dust and ashes!"

Joan had cowed down to his feet, with her forehead to the stones.

"Ay, 'tis a heavy blow for thee, my poor lass," said he, stroking her head gently, "but heavier than thou knowest."

Now Jenkyns, who, while struggling to force his way through the crowded area, had seen all that had been

done, came in at this minute, and seeing Joan at her husband's feet, and Arkdale's hand on her hair, the simple 'prentice supposed that all was known and made up between the two. It was therefore with the greatest surprise and horror that he saw his master suddenly start to his feet, in a paroxysm of rage, crying,—

“Oh, 'twas like striking at a human life. May the accursed hand that did it be held out in vain for charity's mite! May it be held out in vain for another hand to grasp it at the hour of death. May——”

“Hist, master; hold your tongue,” cried Jenkyns, rushing at him as if he would seize him by the throat. “D'ye know who you are cursing?”

“Would I did!” groaned the master, stooping to raise Joan,—“would to heaven I did!”

“Then you shall know. ‘Tis *her—your wife!*”

. . . “And in this way, Paul, we lived for many weeks, she speaking to me no more than if she were my servant, and I taking my meals from her in silence, without so much as looking at her face. When she did things

to please me I feigned to take no notice ; but I assure thee, Paul, a favourite dish eaten in this way was often like to choke me. I began my model partly because I had many excellent new ideas, one of which I have told you at the beginning of this letter, and partly to show my wife she had gained but little by her wicked act. I laboured hard, and with effect ; but being much pinched for means, spite of the most careful housewifery on Joan's part that was ever known, I made but slow progress. As I could not make up my mind to tell thee of the blow I had received, I could not ask thee for money, after so much generosity as you have already shown me.

“One day, in the old coffee-biggin where I put by all the spare coins I can for my model, I found a bright gold guinea. My heart leaped at the sight ; but, on getting cool again, I began to ask myself how it came there. I took it to Jenkyns, and asked him concerning it, and, says he, ‘Thee'rt such a heavy sleeper ; but if thee couldst cast an eye in this room by four in the morning, thee 'ud perhaps get an inkling as to where that came from.’ I did as he said, and what, think you, I saw ?—my wife at

her wheel, spinning as for dear life. The sight did me no good, Paul; I was savage that she should have any hand in the thing she had ruined before. So, in the course of that day I went, as by accident, to the biggin, and taking a few coppers I had put in, turned the guinea out on the table before her, bidding her find another place to keep *her* money in. Well, my boy, I grew poorer and poorer. She used her precious guinea, poor soul—unknown to me, she thought—to buy us food. At last came news that gave me more hope than I had ever known before. Mr. —, a great manufacturer of Nottingham—I told you he came once and saw my other model—sent a very particular message to me by the landlord of the Red Lion Inn, where all the quality go when they come here. He wanted to have the pleasure of an interview with me at breakfast the next morning, if I would favour him with my company, at the “Red Lion,” at ten o’clock. What could I do but send my best respects, and say I would come? But, oh, Paul, I was such a ragged beggar to go to breakfast with a gentleman! I can scarcely tell you what I suffered all day thinking of it. The more Jenkyns

and I talked it over, the more necessity there seemed for going in clothes somewhat gentleman-like, and the less probability of being able to do aught of the kind. I should tell you that my wife went out a little before noon, telling Jenkyns she was going to see a gossip of hers at the other end of the town; and that, should she not be back by the dinner-hour, he and his master were not to wait for her. She was *not* back then, nor at the supper-hour, and I was much surprised to hear that the carrier had seen her at —, which, you know, is full ten miles from here. After supper I went to old Speers, the tailor, to make a last appeal to him about letting me have the suit he had made for me before the destruction of my model. He was obstinate as a pig, and laughed at me into the bargain, declaring he had got rid of them, which I did not believe, as Jenkyns had seen them at his shop that very morning.

"I went home and found that Joan had returned. She was looking pale and fagged. I supposed she had been spending an odd shilling or two of her own earning at —, for she had on a new cap, such as wives wear here,

covering all the hair. I asked her no questions, and went to bed with a heavy heart.

"The next morning I awoke late, and turned with a groan to the chair where I had laid my ragged clothes.

"Lad, I thought I was yet asleep and a-dreaming, and rubbed my eyes again and again, till I made sure they saw the same for all the rubbing. My rags were gone, and there lay on the chair the very suit I had ordered of old Speers, as neat a brown cotton shag as ever you saw in country or town.

"I shouted to Jenkyns, who came running in pretty quickly, not having had his inquisitive eye far from the keyhole, I'd warrant, at that minute. The rogue pretended to be as much bewildered as myself, but I soon found out that he knew more of the mystery than he acknowledged, and at last I got it all from him, bit by bit. My wife had been to —, and sold her hair to Pritchards for seven pounds ten, on purpose to get those clothes for me. Paul, what possessed me I know not; but I could not lose such an opportunity for making her

suffer. I put on my old things. I took the others back to old Speers, and forced him to return me the money. I did the same with the shoes and the hat, and came back with the whole sum, for she had spent every farthing on me.

“She was sitting busy at her wheel, which she stopped as I went up to her.

“‘Joan,’ said I, ‘here is your money; I have nothing to do with it, and I request that you do not again meddle in my affairs.’ And I put the money in her hand and turned.

“A little cry came after me.

“‘Humphrey!’

“I turned sullenly. She was standing up with the money in her hand.

“‘You’d never be so cruel as this,’ she said, with the tears running down her face. ‘I walked twenty mile, Humphrey, to get it.’

“‘I have said,’ answered I, and went away to keep my appointment. You will see by what I have told you in the inclosed paper of our interview, that it was my good

fortune to meet with a truly honest and generous rich man, who was not particularly horrified when requested to look a little further than his own nose,—in the way of invention, I mean. The new crank and comb he thinks—But I forgot; I have told you about that on the back of the drawing which I send. Show it to Sir R. C., if you think it wise so to do. On the whole, I would rather you did not. That day you were determined to make good the old saying, Paul, that ‘Fortune makes fortune,’ for on getting home I found thy good news, lad, for which I thank thee; and money, for which I shall give thee no thanks for a year or two, but which, none the less, doth come to me like rain in drought. I told Joan nothing of my talk with Mr. ——, or of your letter, but she soon heard all from Jenkyns.

“I took more rooms in the same house, and kept my work carefully and ostentatiously locked up in a chamber by itself.

“Joan became paler and thinner day by day, yet my heart remained hard as stone to her.

“‘Master is a brute, to treat thee so,’ I heard blunt

Jenkyns say to her one day. He often said as much to my face.

"‘Hush, Jenkyns,’ she said: ‘he is one of those who are slow to take offence; and, once offended, slow to forgive.’

“One morning she came and stood before me in the shop, with a sort of quiet courage and determination that made me angry. I should tell you she had had news that morning through the old farmer, Luke Bristow, that her father had died at Philadelphia, and left her four hundred pounds. She had put the letter by me at breakfast, but I refused to look at it. Of course I got my knowledge from Jenkyns.

“So she stood before me in the shop like one determined to be heard out, and said,—

“‘Humphrey, it is far from me to complain of your treatment. I deserve all that I suffer; but deserving and enduring are two different things. It was not for me to do other than bear all and slave on while you and yours were in need of me. But you told me I should never share your prosperity; and I have been allowing myself

lately to take this much comfort from your increasing hardness,—I mean to think that that prosperity is now on the road to you, and so you are wishing me away.'

"'As to that,' I muttered, 'I want no scandal; no separating. I've something else to think of.'

"'Nay,' answered she, with a sigh, 'I think I could manage for myself without causing you any annoy or trouble. Some money has been left me by my poor father; it is but natural I should take a journey to see after it. Luke Bristow writes to me, through the clergyman, very kindly. My father has left him a hundred pounds, and I think he would be quite willing for me to begin my old life there again. The grandmother is dead, and Margery married; they must need a woman in the place; and with my little fortune, I need not work so very hard at my wheel to make both ends meet.'

"She was silent, and I was, too. My heart seemed like something alive, but shut down under ice that it struggled against but could not break its way through. Paul, I was fool enough to think she loved me too well to leave me.

"As I did not speak, she said, by-and-by, with her voice all a-tremble,—

"So I hope you'll think it best to let me go, and soon, very soon, for it's getting more than I can bear."

"You are welcome, Joan, to go when you please," answered I. "But whenever or wherever you go, I would have you remember you go as my wife, with sufficient to keep you always, according to my means."

"I was thinking of setting out to-morrow," she said. "Do you see any objection?"

"I see no objection to your doing exactly as you please about it," I answered, turning to my work.

"She is gone, Paul, and I am alone with Dick and Jenkyns. Ah, lad, I should like 'some weel' to see thee now!"

"Jenkyns took down her wheel and other bits of things, and stowed them on the coach in good time.

"At last she came out into the shop in her cloak and hood.

"She went straight to the door.

"I bit my lip nigh through, trying not to call after her.

"'Good-bye, Humphrey,' said she.

"I rose, and took up my hat, muttering,—

"'It won't start for half an hour yet. I shall go down with you, as Jenkyns doesn't seem to know about the fare.'

"I went out with her, and we walked down the street side by side.

"It was a fine dry day for April; the dust was thick on the roads. Our feet trod so quiet it seemed like walking in a dream. She had started none too soon, for the coach met us by the mile-stone. It was fortunate Jenkyns was there, for I seemed unable to do a thing,—coach and everything swam before my eyes.

"'Good-bye, Humphrey,' she said, and held out her thin, little hand.

"'Peace be with thee, Joan,' said I, and she answered as they do in church to those words,—'And with thy spirit.'

"And she is gone, Paul. Come, lad, come and see me,

if thou canst. Thee shall find me hard at work, and
that is all the good I can tell thee of

"Thy brother,

"HUMPHREY ARKDALE."

"Ferryman!"

The ferryman was asleep under a tree on the other side of the river.

The man who had shouted to him stood idly looking on the ground and making marks with his stick. He drew a 15 and made a circle round it, and smiled as he looked down at it.

It was a soft September evening; the roar of the great fair came fitfully with the wafts of a sultry wind across the fields.

"Ferry!" shouted the strong, mellow voice again. And this time the ferryman woke, lumbered into his boat, and came rapidly across.

The boat touched the bank, and the ferryman's hand touched the ferryman's cap at the same time, for the dis-

turbing stranger was somewhat richly dressed, and unlike the gaudy fair-goers.

"Look here, my man," said he, as he seated himself and took a crown from his pocket; could you put me down by Chesterton, by Farmer Bristow's field?"

"I could," returned the ferryman, in a tone that seemed to intimate a crown was about his usual charge for the distance mentioned.

The boat glided gently along; the stranger leaned his elbow on his knee and his chin in his hand, and looked down at the sunset colours reflected in the river. The sunset colours, and many strange things mixed up with them, reflected from his own mind. And what does he see?

A parting in a dusty road three years ago.

A crowded room in the Free Grammar School at Bolton. A machine model at work.

A factory at Nottingham.

A bread riot.

Factories at Chorley.

A mill burning in sight of the soldiery.

A handsome house and grounds.

A boudoir fitted as for a bride.

A woman's face, that seems now to be drawing him along the river as it drew him years ago.

He had said to her, "Thou shalt not share my prosperity;" and in after-days, when his heart longed for her, he told himself he would not seek her, to unsay those cruel words, till he had a fortune worthy of laying at her feet with his remorse.

That time had come at last. He was a rich man—his house was prepared—he had come to seek her.

How lazily the boat crept along the water!

It reached the well-known field and stopped, rocking against the muddy bank. The ferryman took his crown with a grunt, as much as to say it was a hard-earned coin. His passenger leaped on shore, and took the nearest way across the field.

There was the old lane, exactly the same as ever; the rotten, decrepid houses, no worse and no better. The same old stone passages, the same cripple in one making mats; the same sour-visaged old dame in another,

with her staff in one hand and her ale-jug on her knee.

The visitor made straight for a certain door that stood open, and put his foot upon the threshold.

There was the settle, with the saddles on the back; the trusses of hay in the corner, the spinning-wheel, the long, low, sunny window, with the ripe apples knocking against it. There was the bench, and round it sat Farmer Bristow and his two sons, eating cold pork.

"Good day, farmer."

All three looked up with a lump of pork suspended midway 'twixt plate and mouth.

"Good day, master," answered the farmer; "and whoa might yo be, an' I may be so bowld?"

"I believe there's one Mistress Arkdale lodges here,— am I right?"

The farmer put his piece of pork in his mouth, shut his lips over it tightly, and stared at his visitor. A scowl of recognition came over his face.

"We called her Joan Merryweather in these parts," said he.

"Is she in?"

"No."

"Can you tell me where I shall find her?"

"In the churchyard," was the gruff answer.

"Is she coming back from the fair that way?"

The farmer bent over' his plate, as if he had already given all the information he intended to give.

The guest so uncharitably received turned away with a smile, and looking all around him—north, south, east, and west—for a certain slim figure in modest fair-day attire, pursued his way to the churchyard.

He chose a path *she* always used to choose, because it led her past her mother's grave. She used to rest there, he remembered, on her way home.

Should he find her sitting there now?

He approached through the long grasses and the drooping little trees, with an eager step.

Nay, the grave was lonely. A tiny bird flew away from it as he came through into the little chamber of willows wherein it and several others nestled, hidden from the path. He, too, would have turned away quickly,

but that something caught his eye and held it. It was four letters—four letters, fresh and black, on the white headstone.

He fell on his knees by the mound and spelt all that the stone bore—spelt it out, over and over, like a child. And this was what he read, and at last understood,—

HERE LYETH THE DUST OF
GRACE MERRYWEATHER,
AND OF
Her only Daughter,
JOAN.

* * * *

Before the stranger left the village there was added to the name Joan,—

THE FAITHFUL AND BELOVED WIFE OF
HUMPHREY ARKDALE.

THE HAUNTED CRUST.



THE HAUNTED CRUST.

CAN'T you remember Jerry Rouse, sir, the little cobbler of Pickersgill? How should you, though? Poor Jerry! I suppose his busy little fingers were stiff and cold in his coffin before you saw the light.

It was on a Christmas-eve, forty years ago, that that poor little cobbler, who lies in the churchyard yonder, nothing but senseless dust, was a piece of living flesh and blood, suffering and shaking under such a temptation, that if I told what it was, and that he gave way to it, there are those who wouldn't let him rest in peace among their kith and kin,—no, not now, though it's forty years ago; they'd go and tear his bones out of their grave this very night,—this very instant.

Now, at the time I'm speaking of, the street running down to the river was the High Street of Pickersgill, and what they call the High Street now, was a

long, close court, called Gadshill-in-the-Fields. Come, come, Mistress Sicklemore, you are not so young but you remember that, surely? And you remember Jerry, now, I'll be bound. Call him to mind,—a little man, know you, a tiny little man, with coal black eyes and hair, and a pale, sickly, happy little face. Haven't you seen him sitting at the open window of number three, the dirtiest house in the court? Of course you have; and his black-eyed, ragged little children playing outside.

His wife Nance was a well-looking body enough in her day, but such a scold, and such a dirty muddling kind of a woman, that if Jerry hadn't had her, nobody else would. She set her cap at me once, did Nance; but there! what kind of cap was it; so black, you wouldn't have picked it up in the street. However, Jerry had a kind heart, you know; and seeing how Nance was getting a longish way on the other side of her teens, and sourer and sourer every day, out of very charity he went to her mother, who was beginning to scout her, and says he,—



"Mistress Jessop, will you put in a word for me with Nance? I haven't a farthing till I get paid for heeling these boots in my hand," he says. "I earn my bread from hand to mouth, but I think I could earn Nance's too, if she'd be so kind as to say yes."

"Do you know what kind of a temper she is?" says Nance's mother.

"Yes, ma'am," says Jerry; "but not having much temper myself, I think we might get along very well."

"Do you know she's the dirtiest thing about a house that ever was?"

"That, ma'am," said Jerry, "is the chief consideration; I know there's not another woman in Pickersgill would put up with my ways in that respect, for I can't abide cleaning, ma'am; wet boards, and the sight of pails of water about, would be the death of me. So, if you see no objections yourself, and Nance 'ud be so very kind, I think, ma'am, as it 'ud be a very happy union."

And so it was, in Jerry's opinion; and I suppose he was the best judge, wasn't he? Nance Jessop kept to her part in the agreement, at any rate; for a dirtier place than Jerry's little house at Gadshill-in-the-Fields, and dirtier children than Jerry's seven, you wouldn't light on in a month's march.

I say seven, but, now, Jerry's eldest girl was an exception to all the rest. She grew up as fair and clean in all that dirt, as a flower'll grow up out of the mould that's nourished it. I've looked at her as I've come through the court many a time, and never been able to get her face from before my eye all day afterwards. There 'ud be five black-eyed, big-headed little things moping about in the dirt, some inside the door, and some out, while Jerry sat in his window whistling over his work; and there on the doorstep 'ud be little Mercy. I've seen her sitting there a good many times, yet I've never seen the same look on that child's face twice in my life; she seemed always so different from the others, so busy in her thoughts. I never saw her play, ever since she was



out of her mother's arms; she seemed to do nothing but sit and read, and nurse babies on the doorstep.

Once, when I was having a gossip with Jerry—who had his share of tongue, I can tell you—some boys in the court got teasing little hump-backed Tommy, and Mercy's face got quite fierce as she watched them. She asked Jerry to speak to them two or three times, but he always said, “Oh, Tommy doesn't mind it.” So I went myself and sent the boys off, and brought back Tommy to where his brothers and sisters were at play.

“Do you think he does mind it, then?” I said to Mercy.

“I don't know,” she said, with a great sigh. “I do. I mind it so much, when they're mocked and pointed at, that I wish they were dead; and I'm always wishing they'd never been born.”

You see, the poor child felt all that Tommy would have felt, if he had been right sharp, which he wasn't; and all that Jerry would have felt, if his eyes had been open to the wretched bringing up of his chil-

dren, which they were not; and all that Nance would have felt, if she'd been a different kind of woman; but as for poor Nance, she thought if she clouted them all round once or twice a day, and kept them from getting to any water, she was giving them as good an education as a poor cobbler's children ought to expect.

Well; I went away from Pickersgill for three years or so, and when I came back I found Mercy grown up, and the talk of all the place. Her face was small; not round, nor dimpled, yet not thin-looking, but beautifully soft, and of the same warm whiteness all over; just, perhaps, a little warmer in the middle of the cheeks, as you see a bunch of apple-blossom gets pinker towards the heart. Yes, certainly, if this kind of face, with full and sorrowful blue eyes, with a blue shadow lying under them, and pinky eyelids heavy with black lashes that seemed always wanting to go to sleep on her cheek, a mouth like two cherries pressing together,—if a face like this, set round with rings of chestnut hair, can make a girl pretty, cer-

tainly Mercy had such a one, and must have been called pretty even now; though ideas have changed since the days she used to put the clerks at Flounger's out of their reckoning every time she passed the office-windows.

Now, at the time of my coming back to Pickersgill, Mercy had four sweethearts.

There was Smilish, the red-haired herring-man, always sliding in a soft word with his herrings, till Jerry was obliged to leave off having them, which was a great privation to the family,—herrings, and Smilish's herrings in particular, being cheap just then.

Then, too, there was Felix Hadup, a real gentleman clerk at Flounger's office, who, for the love of Mercy, took to wearing out his boots in quite a wonderful way, so that Jerry always had a pair on hand. And, one day, when a dragoon regiment was billeted on Pickersgill, all the children playing out of doors at Gadshill-in-the-Fields began to cry and rush home; and Jerry himself, he tells me, quaked a bit when he looked up and found a great fellow, standing six feet in his

boots, before his window, with his face as red as his coat, making a downright honest offer through his great moustache for Mercy, wanting to march her off to Ireland with his regiment next morning. Of course, Mercy was called to speak for herself, through the window; and, poor fellow, as he went back up the court he looked so mild and meek, that, instead of being afraid of him, all the children took hold of hands, and stood in a line staring at him so that he couldn't pass.

He was the third. Well; the fourth was a man who, of all men in the world, came least to Jerry's fancy, as you may know when I tell you that that man was Dan Harroway,—ay, Dan o' the water; Dan himself. You recollect him; ay, ay? There'll be something happen, I should think, when black-eyed Dan's forgotten in these parts. Ah! talk of your Charlie Steers and your Willie Stackletons of these days—the girls stare after them, it's true—but Dan, dark Dan o' the water, he was something to stare after, I warrant you. Ah! it's all very well; but, Mr. Martin, begging your pardon, I won't believe your housekeeper there forgets all the

heartaches Dan made in Pickersgill among the lasses of her day. Come, come, that's part of my story; you needn't take my ale away for that; there's no danger of Dan now; eh, Mistress Sicklemore?

Well, I suppose there's no occasion for me to tell any of you that Dan wasn't a saint. Though I do say he wasn't worse than Charlie the waterman, or Will the horse-breaker. In the first place, he was driven to lead the sort of life he did in a good part by his old miser of a father, who turned him out of doors at sixteen. Then, you know, being such a dare-devil with horses, such a fellow with his oar, and such a little king in his looks, he got soon picked up, and petted, and spoiled, by the sporting gentlemen about here,—ay, and I may say, by more than one sporting lady too. Why, there was my Lady Caperdown, they say, would have married him out-and-out, only she got a shock when Dan took her first love-letter to her son's valet, thinking it was some order about the stables, and commanded him, like an emperor, to read it to him, as he ^ couldn't either read or write.

How often I've seen him standing in his bright top-boots and scarlet hunting-coat outside here; or in his striped regatta shirt, amongst all the low fellows who seem to grow out of the water at boating times, standing out from them all, as I tell you, like a born king. He had a clear dark skin, with the blood always flushing under it, but never standing florid in his cheeks; curly black hair; and black eyes,—not an eye like Jerry's, though it was as black, but not soft and merry and contented, but a restless, fierce black eye, that seemed to be always roaming about, looking for something it could never find; and every glance seemed edged and pointed like a steel dart. He had half a score of names—the Little King, the Emperor, the Sultan, Lucifer; and as far as pride and dark good looks went, I must say, he deserved them all, and the last particularly. I think he was prouder to women than to men; and had need have been if all the tales I've heard were true. I don't mean to say Dan would pass by a pretty girl without looking at her;—not he; but if she minced in her walk, and seemed to know

he was looking at her, he would stare in his haughty, scornful way, as much as to say, "You needn't put yourself out; I was only thinking you've got decent eyes or a decent figure, and it's a pity the rest of you's not so good;" so that really a girl was as much put out as flattered by one of his looks; and he was so cool and proud with the handsome ladies he rode with, that it got quite a saying in Pickersgill, "No more in love than Dan o' the water."

And now I'm going to tell you about Dan and Mercy's first meeting.

I suppose he had noticed her before. I should think he had noticed her as the prettiest girl in Pickersgill, and as the only girl in Pickersgill who didn't gape after him (present company, Mistress Sicklemore, excepted, of course).

Well, it was one muggy November night, Mercy and little Tommy and I were coming up the High Street together. I was trying to comfort the poor lass a bit, for times just then were going hard with Jerry; indeed, just then was the coming on of hard times for

more than him. We had got to the end of the street, when Dan came flashing round the corner on Richardson's black horse.

"Holloa, Matthew!" he shouts, in his grand, commanding way, stopping close to the pavement, "give me a light, quick; come, man. I've got a seven-mile ride,—look sharp!"

"Quicker said than done, Dan Harroway, in this wind," says I, taking out my tinder-box.

Dan held his match down while I struck: but the wind blew it out directly it was lighted; so I, stupid-like, asked Mercy to come and hold up her shawl to make shade against the wind. She did come close to the horse, and held up her shawl while Dan bent down, holding the reins and his pipe in one hand, and the match in the other ready to catch the light. It lit and went out half a dozen times, and while I was scraping and scraping away, I knew well enough that Dan was looking at Mercy; she knew it too, and you would have thought such a girl would have kept her eyes to herself; but whether she got angry or what,



Mercy raised hers to Dan's face as it bent down close to her.

Now, I don't know much about love nonsense myself, still I could but feel when Mercy raised her eyes and found Dan's face within a few inches of hers, looking at her as I'd never seen him look at any other woman in his life, his fiery eyes all soft, and seeming to have found somewhere to rest on at last, and his proud-set lips in a smile: when I saw this, I say, and saw, too, how he seemed to have the power of holding those sorrowful blue eyes of Mercy's to his as by a charm, I said to myself,—“There, you've done something for Jerry, calling her to hold up her shawl, you have; you thought if you couldn't strike one match, you'd strike another. I'm mistaken if this isn't the beginning of trouble.”

And so it turned out to be.

Dan may have courted her with his eyes all that winter, for what I know; but I saw nothing more myself, till one fine morning early in the year. He was riding slowly up the road from Paisley woods, with a

bunch of wild blue hyacinths lying on his horse before him, close to the path where Mercy was coming along. I was on the other side: I don't think either of them saw me.

Presently Dan stopped his horse, and stooped and held the flowers out to her, smiling. Mercy stopped and looked at them. No doubt it seemed pleasant to the poor child, who never had time to pick a flower for herself, and who got many a slap from Nance for running to pick up the clover-blooms that fell out of the wagons passing the top of the court; no doubt it seemed very pleasant and tempting to have a bunch of sweet-smelling bluebells held out to her like that by Emperor Dan. She looked and looked for nearly a minute, and then shook her head, as much as to say "I mustn't," like a child, and began to walk on quicker.

Dan's face darkened, and he turned his horse right across her path, and held the flowers down to her again, while his black eyes seemed half-begging, half-commanding her to take them. Then she held out

her little hand and took them, still like a child frightened into doing wrong.

Dan pricked his horse, and went galloping up the road.

I never smell hyacinths but I see that old road again, with the light-green hedges and the primroses under them; and Dan turning in his saddle as he galloped away, resting one hand on the horse's back; and his dark face, with the sun on it, smiling bright and proud, like a sultan that had been baulked many times, but got his own way at last,—smiling at Mercy while the yellowy-green hedges spun by; and Mercy herself standing just where he had left her, shading her eyes with the flowers, looking after him, ready to cry at what she had done, and yet sick at heart that his horse should bear him so fast out of her sight.

“Trouble coming, Jerry,” I said to myself as I saw her.
“Trouble coming.”

That same morning I had to call on old Harroway, Dan's father, who was my landlord, you know, and who owned

half the wretched houses at Gadshill-in-the-Fields. Dan was in the office, coming out as I went in. I wasn't surprised to see him there, for matters had long been patched up between them; but I was surprised to hear him say,—

“What does it matter to you where the money comes from, so long as you get it?”

“I don't know about that,” said old Harroway, locking up his tin box. “Jerry's money is honest money when it does come.”

“What is mine, then?” Dan said, coming back with a scowl on his face.

“There, there, let it drop,” said the old man, pettishly. “You've had your own way, and that's enough; I don't know what you're after, but if you choose to pay me the rent, of course I shan't worry him for it.”

“But, mind, the debt goes on just the same,” said Dan; “and I take my money back when I like, giving you a week to get it from him.”

And Dan went out, just nodding to me; and old Harroway, not seeing me yet, looked out of the grimy window

after him, and screwed up his yellow face, and shook his bald head, as much as to say, "Do you think I don't know what you're after, my boy?"

I can tell you I wished no little that I knew; for though I could make neither head nor tail of what I had heard, and wouldn't for the world have made Jerry uncomfortable about it, and so stopped any good Dan in his love for Mercy might be going to do him, still I found myself every time I passed their place croaking like an old raven,—

"There's trouble coming, Jerry; trouble coming!"

That same year, just a week before Christmas, on a Saturday night, I set off from The Water-Lily to pay Jerry Rouse a visit. Ay, that was a time that won't be forgotten in Pickersgill for a few years to come, I should say, —not by any, at least, who saw what I saw on my walk to Jerry's that Saturday night. Half-dozens and dozens of hungry, ragged men outside bakers' shops, staring as if they'd draw the loaves out with their eyes; women going from shop to shop, to get the most they could for their few halfpence; and here and there a man carrying a pole with

a loaf at the top and a great ticket to show the price and the size together. What did it mean, Mr. Martin? Why, it was the time of the great distress in all the factory places; and at Pickersgill it was as bad or worse than anywhere, and it was the hearing of a sore tale of starvation at Gadshill-in-the-Fields that made me get up from the comfortable fireside of The Water-Lily, and set out on my visit to Jerry.

Now, Saturday night, I should tell you, was not by any means a pleasant time for visiting Jerry. In the first place, Saturday was Nance's washing-day, and you wouldn't be able to move for wet rags of clothes hung on lines across and across the room. It was her cleaning day too, such cleaning as she did; and you'd be sure to find her broke down in the midst of it, squatting before the fire, railing at Jerry because he wouldn't take the baby, who was always cross on a Saturday night, because the steam of the wet clothes brought his cough on. Jerry himself would be sitting in the corner where Nance had driven him; bending his pale, good-tempered little face over his work; and surrounded by old boots, which the children would be play-

ing with and mauling about so, that when he wanted a left, he found all rights, or when he wanted a right, all lefts.

That was Jerry's home on that Saturday night; not a very bright one certainly, but a palace to many a home at Gadshill-in-the-Fields.

But now Jerry didn't look upon any of these things as his troubles, but as all Nance's; and listened patiently to her complaining, pitying her from the bottom of his kind, simple heart, and wondering if ever a woman, let her be saint, martyr, or what, had as much to put up with as his Nance.

He had one trouble of his own, though, had Jerry. Where was Mercy these Saturday nights? Tramping through the mud and mire, taking home the work as fast as he could do it? As fast as he could do it: yes, but Mercy was not so quick gone on the errands as she used to be, and poor Jerry noticed it; and had queer uneasy thoughts about it, that made him stick his awl into his thumb sometimes.

And so I found him that Saturday night, sitting sweat-

ing over his work, in the steam and smoke, and pondering these things concerning Mercy.

I made the best of my way among the wet clothes to him, after speaking to Nance and the children.

"Ah, Matthew," he said, with a shake back of his matted hair and a lightening up of his pale face, "all the compliments of the season to you for coming to see us in this family kind o' way. You must take us as we are, you know; we don't make no stranger of you; do we, Nance? Will you clear a chair for Matthew, my dear? and I dare say he'll be so good as to hold the little 'un for you."

"No, thank you, Jerry; I'm much beholden to you, but I'd rather be excused," says I. "Me hold a baby, indeed! No, no; that's a thing I never could do. In the first place, I never can guess how far a child comes down to in its long-clothes; and if you go to stretch your arms out, taking it to be taller than it is, it'll slip through 'em; or if you go to take it by the middle, the head will hang down and bring on convulsions or something."

So I let Jerry's baby alone, and took a chair, and while I was talking to him stuck my pockets out behind, to show

the mince-meat pies and oranges. It wasn't long before they were found out; for soon, instead of fretting and whining, you could hear nothing but sucking and munching all over the room; and then by degrees came the whole lot hanging about my knees, and looking up at me with their big eyes, as if I was the most wonderful old boy that ever lived. I don't like children,—I never did; but I liked to feel Jerry's children pick my pockets.

"So you've got a new landlord, Jerry?" I said to him.

Jerry looked up from the thread he was waxing, quite astonished.

"Haven't you heard that old Harroway said good-bye to us all last night?" says I.

"No," said Jerry.

"Well, he did; he died at his sister's farm at Basset."

"And who'll be our landlord now?" asked Jerry.

"Who? Why, who but his son," said I, "Young Dan o' the water?"

Jerry laid down the boots he was welting, and sat considering, drawing up his little knees, and winding his piece of waxed thread round and round them.

"Matthew," he said, presently, in a low voice, so that Nance shouldn't hear him, "I'm sorry. I'm sorrier for this yer than I can tell you."

"And why, Jerry?" I asked him.

"Because," says he, taking up his boot again, and sticking it between his knees, sole upwards, and bringing his fist down upon the sole with all his might, "I'd rather Dan Harroway be obligated to me for a sound lickin', than I'd be obligated to him for the standin' over of half a year's rent, as 'll have to be the case now. Poor old Harroway, he must have foresaw as his end was nigh, for he's let me alone since the spring, and not worried me once."

Ay, thinks I, Dan could tell you two stories to that one; but I only said,—

"It appears to me, Jerry Rouse, you're a shade *too* hard on that lad—that Dan Harroway; it does, now."

"Well, I'm sorry if I am; and I'm willin' to give him every excuse so long as he keeps out o' my way. He may mend some time or other, but I ain't much hopes myself o' such a character; he's had too much to do with the water for me."

"Why, man alive, what harm could the water do him?" says I.

"What harm?" says Jerry; "why, it's my opinion as the first harm that ever was, was washed ashore by water. Ah! it's a queer thing, and it's the greatest pity as is that we can't do without it; but we can't, I suppose. It's one o' the necessities as came to us with the fall o' man. What harm is there in it, indeed? Why, don't you suppose as the sarpint that tempted Adam's missus was a sea sarpint?—o' course he was; and I tell you, there's no countin' the harm there is in water. Look at yer mud-larks, and your river thieves, and your pierits, and then tell me as there's no harm in water. And this Dan Harroway,—why, as I may say, he's been bred to it. I mind him when he come up no higher than my knee, a-chippin' little boats out o' nothing one minute, and a pumpin' on hisself in the market-place at Bassett another; and when I saw it, I always said as he'd come to ruin. So, he's my landlord, is he? Well, landlord or no landlord, let me catch him making eyes at my gal agen, —that's all."

"How do you know but what he means well by her, Jerry?" said I.

"Mean well by her!" says Jerry; "not he. No, no; whatever Dan is, he's a bit above us; though as for Mercy herself, a king might mean well by her, for that matter. She has a face of her own, has Mercy, and a figure too,—bless her. As Smilish, over the way, says (for I can't never go to have a chat with Smilish now, but what he begins spelling and speering about her; though, poor chap, he's lived off a herring and a tater this fortnight, they say),—'She's as pretty,' says Smilish, speaking o' Mercy, 'as a wilet; and she don't know it no more 'an a wilet.' No more she don't; but I'll warrant, if Dan Harroway sets his evil eye upon her, she'll know it soon enough. Halloa! who's that?"

It was Smilish himself, poking his red head in at the door.

"Talk of angels," said Jerry, "and,—but, lor', man, what's the matter with you? Have you seen a ghost?"

"Come here, Jerry Rouse," said Smilish, beckoning with his great hand.

Jerry and I got up and went to the door.

"Look here, Jerry Rouse," said Smilish, dragging him out and pointing up the court.

Now when I tell you the moon was so bright you could see the fish-scales sticking to Smilish's red hand as he pointed, you'll see that there was no mistaking two figures which stood by the wall of a half-finished house at the top of the court. In that light, if they belonged to the parish at all, Jerry must know them. They did belong to the parish, and Jerry did know them.

It was Dan and Mercy.

They were holding hands, saying good-bye, as it seemed. We all three stood looking at them a minute or more; then Jerry took up the corner of his leather apron, and tucked it in the string that went round his waist, and went up the court to them. His house was number three, you know, so there was but the length of two houses to go.

The two dropped each other's hands as they saw him; Mercy shrank back, but Dan stood up in his boots and faced him like a man.

"Mercy, my gal," said Jerry, laying his hand on her shoulder, and pointing to his wretched little place, "go home;" and she went home, and Smilish turned his face away.

Then Jerry turned to Dan, and, says he,—

"Dan Harroway," says he, "you're my landlord, as I hear, and I'm half a year's rent in your debt. I don't want to see my little ones turned out in the cold, without a roof to cover 'em, so I can't say exactly what I should a-said to you if to-day had been yesterday. All I say now is, don't let me catch you talking to my gal agen."

"Now I think by Dan's face he was going to make him a quiet answer; but, as ill-luck would have it, who should pass the end of the court that minute but Jem Barnes and Stackleton, and a lot more of Dan's friends, on their way home from a card party at The Water-Lily; and of course when they caught sight of Dan and Jerry standing like that, and knowing Dan's goings-on with Mercy, of course they stopped to see the fun, Dan turned on his heel to go up to them.

Jerry gripped him by the collar and jerked him back.

"Dan Harroway," says he, "you don't go out o' this yer court till you've giv' me your promise as you'll never speak another word to my gal in your life."

"Don't I?" said Dan, wrenching himself away; "we'll see about that. What! do you suppose I care for your girl? and if I did, why, haven't I as much right to have my say to her as any one else?"

"I'll tell you," said Jerry, his passion up as he heard all the young fellows laughing at him. "Because, Dan Harroway, you haven't a rag to your back as belongs to you by good rights, nor a drop o' blood in your body that's been made by honest-earned wittles. You live by hook and by crook, spendin' here and takin' there, and betting and gambling and drinking. They tell me as you're proud; but I tell you, Dan Harroway, that me as cuts this yer poor figure by the side of you, have got more pride in me 'an you have, for I've got pride enough to keep me slaving and sweating in that 'ere hole as you calls yourself landlord of, from year's end to year's end, rathener I'd take a penny from the parish, or any man alive, to go to the feed o' them little uns."

"Then look you, Jerry Rouse," said Dan, flashing on him with his eyes as the young fellows came nearer, "you owe me two quarters' rent; if you've got the pride you're telling of, pay it me down now."

"I can't, you know it," Jerry said, with a groan; "I'd give my head if I could."

"Very well; you'll beg my pardon for every word you've said to me this night, or you'll suffer for it. I'll give you till over Christmas-day; if you haven't begged my pardon or paid down your rent by then, you turn out, bag and baggage."

And Dan turned and walked away.

"Stop a bit," said Jerry, following him and laying his hand on his shoulder; "do you promise me what I asked you about my gal?"

"No," said Dan Harroway, fiercely, "I don't. Is that plain?"

Jerry didn't answer him, but turned and walked home.

"Mercy," he said, taking off his apron as he came in at the door, "put on your bonnet, and come along o' me.

I'm a-goin' to take you over to your grandmother's at Bassett, my wench. You can't bide here no longer."

With a face white as a sheet, Mercy got a handkerchief, and rolled up a few things in it; among 'em I saw some dead flowers, and I knew by the long stalks what they were. Then she kissed 'em all round, and followed her father out of the door without speaking a word.

What I'm going to tell you now about Jerry, I didn't see myself, but he's told it to me so many a time that I've got it all before me as clear and real as if I had seen it, and it had happened a week ago instead of forty years.

It was Christmas-eve, then, going on for eleven o' the clock; Jerry sat by himself, finishing Jem Barnes's Sunday boots, which he'd been patching up.

The candle stood on a three-legged stool in front of him, and every now and then Jerry would look at it, and every time he looked at it, his fingers flew faster.

There were two inches of candle, and there was what a quick man would call a good hour's work. Two inches of candle and not a scrap more in the house,—not a scrap

more, most likely, in all the court. Few houses, indeed, at Gadshill-in-the-Fields had a scrap of bread in them that night, let alone candle or firing.

Two inches of candle and a good hour's work to do! It seemed as sure as fate the candle must go out before that work was done, yet Jerry looked at it and worked fiercer—looked at it and worked fiercer. His dirty, pallid, flat-nailed fingers flew, and the candle burned.

It was a race that would have held your breath to watch, a race for life or death. If Jerry's fingers won it, it was life—if the candle won it, it was death; for while he worked so that he could tell if one second was shorter weight than another, there came from the upstairs room faint cries and wailings. And Jerry knew what it was. He had heard it in many a house this winter; but it had never been to his before.

It was a wolf up there in that room,—a wolf gnawing away at his seven little children and his poor sick wife;—hunger, it was, and it had come upon them sudden and savage, and Jerry knew that if it wasn't driven off that night it must devour them all away from him,—devour

him too,—and the only thing he could drive it away with was the shilling he would get when he took Jem Barnes's boots home.

So he raced with the candle till the drops came out thick on his forehead.

There was one inch now, and there was more than half an hour's work to do.

The candle burned and the fingers flew,—flew, ay, so fast, that every now and then Jerry felt in doubt as to whether they carried the thread along with them or not; but if he stopped to find out, his race was lost, for the candle had nothing to stop for, so he let 'em tremble and shake over the boot that was stuck between his knees.

The fingers flew, and the candle burned,—the race was drawing to an end.

The candle blazed up. Jerry stuck his last stitch. The wick fell and went out. Jerry hugged his boot, and gave a great cry. His job was done.

The moonlight falling through the dusty window showed him where his battered old hat lay on the chair. He

snatched it up and the fellow-boot, and ran out in his shirt-sleeves, calling up the dark narrow stairs as he went by them,—“Take the little uns to you, Nance, and keep ‘em warm. I’ve done it, and I’ll be back in a minute with some wittles.”

“Back in a minute,” Jerry said; but it took him a sharpish run to get to Jem Barnes’s house in five. When he got there, there wasn’t a light to be seen in any of the windows. He knocked once. No one came. Twice—still no one came.

Jerry took hold of the knocker, and thumped it down every two seconds fierce and hard. Still no one came.

By-and-by old Constable Mullinger turned up the street to see what the noise was about.

“Are you gone mad?” said he to Jerry. “Don’t you see they’re all out? Be off about your business, or I’ll be helping you with your knocking.”

Jerry reeled back into the middle of the road, and stared up at the house. He had never thought of this. Had he run the race with the candle for nothing?

No wonder old Mullinger thought he was mad, to see



him standing there without his coat, his old hat stuck at the back of his head, and his boots in his hand, staring at the dark windows. Soon the cold began to go through and through him, and he turned, shivering and half stupefied, and went back home.

Going in, he stumbled against the stairs and made a noise; and then he stood listening, feeling sure that all the seven little children would cry out to him for the food he had promised to be back with in a minute.

No. All was still,—all except his own heart thumping away at the foot of the stairs.

“They’ve fell asleep,” he said to himself; “they won’t feel the wolf for a little while, not perhaps till I get ‘em some work’us bread in the morning.”

He wouldn’t go up for fear of disturbing them; so he went and sat on his bench in the dusky moonlight, and took up a boot of little Tommy’s and his awl, and tried to work, just for the sake of keeping himself from thinking, and from feeling the gnawing at his inside.

He worked, but the thinking and the gnawing went on just the same.

He worked, but the dark handsome face of Dan Harroway kept coming between him and little Tommy's boot, making him grip his awl and breathe hard.

He worked, but the loneliness and the gnawing made him get so light and sharp in his wits that he couldn't sit still, so he stood up with his work in his hand.

By-and-by he dropped the boot and stood still, not breathing at all, with the awl in his hand.

A thought had come to him—a thought of how to muzzle the wolf.

He went to the foot of the stairs and listened,—still all was quiet. He kicked off his boots, and crept up, feeling by the damp wall. The door was open, and Jerry went in and stood in the middle of the room, looking at the row of ragged little beds that lay along the splintery floor. The moonlight fell upon each wizened sharp face, and each wizened dirty hand lying over the patchwork quilts.

Now, while Jerry stood looking at them all with that dreadful uncommon sharpness I told you of, which made him feel as if he could do anything in the world if he set



his mind on it, he heard Nance muttering, and when he went to listen what she said, he found she was cursing him in her sleep for having married her. Jerry listened, and got all cold and stiff about the roots of his hair, and the room seemed to spin round and round him,—beds, door, patched window, with the big yellow moon staring in it, and all,—all seemed to spin round; and Jerry looked after the spinning beds, and then at the spinning moon, and wished it away. He gripped his awl hard and fast, and flung himself down by the first of the beds. Still it seemed spinning away from him, and he made a clutch at it with his left hand, and when he had got it set his knee on it; then his left hand clutched a thin little shoulder,—clutched it so tight that there was a scream, and that scream woke Nance and all the rest; and taking him to have come back with the victuals, they all set up a wailing cry for joy, and stretched out their hands.

And Jerry lifted up his head and looked at the empty thin hands and hungry faces, and pointed to his awl, and said to 'em, with a great lift of his chest at every word,—

"Look here, little uns, it's earned your bread all along, this yer; and if so be it can't arn your bread any more, can't it—can't it put you to—to—to sleep, little uns—just to sleep—only to sleep?"

He laid himself down on the bed. The bright tip of the awl glittered, and then was hidden in the clothes. He pressed himself closer and closer over the child, and his awl was in his hand under him. There was just a touch—a cold, sharp touch—on a bony chest, only a touch; and it was not Jerry's chest, yet it was Jerry who leaped to his feet, with almost a yell, as if a sword had gone through him. Leaped to his feet and cleared the dark stairs in two springs, and rushed out of the house door, and away up the court, without ever a bit of shoe to his foot or coat to his back, or cap to his head,—rushed along towards the town-end of the court in his shirt and ragged trousers and bare feet, and with his awl in his hand,—rushed as if a demon were after him,—rushed, and once he knocked himself against a post, like a blind, wild animal. Then he ran on till he got to the end of the court and out into the street,—the dark still street, and he saw one man in it, and he made up to

him. The man turned, and seeing Jerry coming towards him with his awl, so wild and strange, began to quicken his pace.

But Jerry got up to him and made a spring, and threw both his arms round him so violently that the man was felled to the ground.

"Don't run away from me! Feller creetur, brother, I got more on me nor I can bear; come and help me! You sha'n't go away till you've helped me!"

"Let me go," said the man, struggling; "let me go free, will you?"

"Hah!" cried Jerry; and looking down on his face, with his knee on his chest, and his awl raised above him, he saw it was Dan Harroway.

The cause of all his trouble that night was there under his knee, and the awl which through him had been nearly turned against his little children was in his hand. Didn't it seem like justice put into his own hands to deal? The knee planted on Dan's chest shook, and the eyes looking down upon him blazed like balls of fire.

Dan Harroway thought his last was come. Suddenly he

felt the weight gone off his chest, and looking up he saw the back of a ragged figure which seemed to be wringing its hands, with the awl in them, and then he saw it run back down the dark court.

Yes, Jerry was running back. He had been to the world for help, and it had sent him greater temptation. Where was he to go now?

Now, while Jerry rushed back down the dark quiet court, crying to himself, "Who'll help me? Is there nobody as'll help me?" there flashed upon him a recollection of a story he had heard,—a story which had always struck him as being much too hard to believe in, and much too wonderful to be at all true; but now, I say, the recollection of it struck upon him like a sudden light in his darkness.

He began to run faster. He passed his own house. He came to the other end of the court, and out into the great brick-fields.

Just before him there was a high heap of bricks and stones and rubbish, where a house had been pulled down. Jerry had but one thought just then, he wanted to get



high. He seemed as if he couldn't get high enough for what he wanted. So he began to climb this mound, sticking his bare feet into the sharp stones and broken bricks till they bled, and helping himself up with his hands till they bled, and when he got to the very top he was well-nigh fainting, and he fell upon his knees.

The big, set moon seemed to be on a level with his head as it stared at him through two window-holes of a half-finished house, and it lighted everything ; the pool of black water below him, the frosted rushes growing round it, and the grey line of field rats passing from the cellar of one of the new houses to a hole in the clay bank.

Jerry threw up his two arms, still holding the awl, and cried out as loud as ever he could cry in his faintness,—

“ If You as made me,” says he, “ can see me now ; if You knows me better than I knows You, come anigh me ! I don’t arst You for myself. There’s somethin’ a tearin’ my inside like a wild beast ; but that I can bear. What I arst You is, save my little uns from me ! Save Dan Harroway from me ! Come anigh me, wherever You are, and lay

hold on this yer. I'm only a poor human creetur, and there's more put on me nor I can bear, an' it's making a devil of me. I don't know how to get at You; I don't know no prayers, but I tell You, as I want You; if ever any poor creetur You've made ever wanted You, I do. Oh, come anigh me! Come anigh me!"

Did anything come anigh him? Jerry says, as the wind rose he heard a rustling all about the mound, like a swooping down of great wings or garments; and his hand got loose, and the awl went whirling down, and fell with a splash into the black water; and Jerry, when he heard the splash, fell a-trembling and hiding his face with his two hands.

He wasn't alone, he says; the sweep-down of wings and the talking in the wind went on. For some time—how long he couldn't tell—he seemed to be lifted right up out of his trouble, and he didn't feel the sharp stones under his knees: and he stayed with those that seemed to have come about him till the moon went down in the window-hole.

At last the bark of a dog made him remember himself;

and he looked up, and finding his awl gone, gave a great shout for joy.

"You've heered me," he said, "You've heered me; and I ain't alone, nor my little uns ain't alone; they've got a better Father 'an me."

Then he came down, slipping and sliding among the stones, and begun to run home all shaking and close to the ground like a lamb just out of the lion's jaw.

As he ran, the dog he had heard bark came across his path with a crust of bread in his mouth; and Jerry seized him by the nape and took the crust from him, and ran home to divide it amongst his children.

When he had got in though, that wild beast he had told of on the mound clawed him for it; and he was just going to fall upon and devour it, and had got it between his teeth, when another wonderful old story coming across him, made him stop and think.

He cleared the table; he moved all the rubbish on the floor on one side with his foot, and covered it over. Then he began looking about for some kind of a table-cloth. He found one, clean and white, in a drawer, and he felt

ready to cry with gratefulness to Nance that she should have such a thing. He spread it on the table, and then he took his crust and laid it in the middle: and after looking at it a long time, he went out softly and shut the door.

He crawled upstairs once more, so faint that he could scarce drag one foot after the other.

The children were all awake, and wailing still. Jerry went and took 'em up, and cuddled 'em one by one in his poor tired arms, and said, with the tears running down his cheeks,—

“Don’t cry, little uns, I’ve been out and I couldn’t get you nothing; but coming back, I see a dog with a crust in his mouth, and I lugged it away, and it lies on the table down below; and I’m a goin’ to arst Him as they say made seven loaves and five little fishes feed four thousand creeturs, if He won’t make that ‘ere little crust below enough to fill us all by mornin’. So go to sleep, little uns, and you, Nance, my woman, go to sleep,—go to sleep, all on you, and let Him do His will by that ‘ere little crust; and we’ll go down in the mornin’ all together and see what we shall find.”

And Jerry went to lie down himself, but somehow he felt as if he'd no right to lie among them that night after his evil thoughts; so he went and stretched himself on the landing outside the threshold of the door, and by-and-by they all fell sound asleep.

It was a cold place, was Jerry's. But the wind that whistled up the stairs and came up through every crack and cranny of the old boards only made him sleep the sweeter, for he dreamed it was the great wings that had come anigh him on the mound.

And so they slept; and there in the room below, all by itself in the moonlight, on the clean white tablecloth, lay THE CRUST.

Now in the morning Jerry woke with the sun on his face, and he got up and woke Nance and the children. He helped Nance on with her things, for she was very sick, and dressed each of the little ones himself; and while he dressed them, each had a different dream to tell him about the CRUST, and the angels that were making a feast for them out of it. And Jerry listened, feeling as if his heart would burst, for what could he say if they all went

down and opened the door and found only the CRUST? Still he daren't gainsay that there would be a feast. He washed them all, and made them kneel down and say the prayers Mercy had taught them; and he made the dressing and the prayers take as much time as he could, for he had great fear of going to the CRUST.

At last, shaking in every limb, he took up the two youngest, one on each arm, and went to the stairs; two more took hold of his coat, and Nance dragged herself along after with the others; and so they all went slowly down.

But when they had got to the foot of the stairs, and Jerry had laid his thumb on the latch of the room door, his heart quite failed him; for he seemed to see, before he opened it, the CRUST lying there with the marks of the dog's teeth in it, and all just as he had left it overnight; so he turned and said to them, in a light kind of way,—

“ P'raps they haven't done yet, little uns. You won't be disappointed if so be they ain't? ”

But seven pairs of black sharp eyes looked at him so suspicious and so keen that Jerry thought he'd better

get the worst over at once, so he lifted the latch and pushed the door in.

He gave one look into the room before him, and then turned back suddenly as if he'd had fire blown into his face.

"Nance, Nance!" he said, "here's a judgment on us! Here's more'n I can bear. Oh, look, old woman! Down on your knees and look. Oh, little uns, I didn't believe not half myself,—but come along! come and look!"

The father and mother, on their knees outside the threshold, and the children clinging to them, all stared into the room.

There was a feast spread on the cobbler's table. Ay, a delicate feast. There was white bread, and there was wine and rich pasties, and in the middle where the crust had lain, there was a shining silver basket of bright Christmas fruit. It was a fair table, I can tell you; for I saw it. Yes; I was there, and I saw it. And I saw Jerry, too, kneeling with his wife Nance and the children on the threshold.

"I knowed as You'd heered me," cried Jerry, presently

lifting his big full eye to the grimy ceiling. "And what ever hand You've done this by, human creetur's hand or not, me and my little uns thanks You for it, and will never a-done thanking you for it while there's breath in our bodies; and I forgive Dan Harroway as You've forgive me. I forgive him, and I'm at peace with him let him do what he likes."

Just as they were going to get up from their knees, the Christmas waits in the court began, and among them there was Nell Gwire and Alice Blane, the sweetest singers in all the country-side; and the music seemed to hold Jerry and the rest to their knees, for coming just then it was like angels' voices giving them a welcome to the feast. Nance and him both began to cry and cling together; and then she, who had been a good singer in her time, but hadn't sung, for temper, twenty years, began joining in, low and soft, with her face raised and her black hair falling all about her to the ground;—and one at a time the little things caught up the tune and sung out loud and shrill, like starved sparrows at the sight of rain. So loud and shrill and piercing that I

couldn't stand it long, but went and picked them up and brought them into the room. When they all came in, treading as if the ground wasn't common ground, Jerry saw me, and said,—

“Is this yer doings, Matthew?” says he; and I said, “No.”

“Then,” says Jerry, “tell me what man's doings it is, that I may thank him, and that all my little uns may thank him.”

“Jerry,” said I, taking him apart, “when you run out in your sore trouble last night, you met a man.”

“Ay!” says Jerry, looking at me hard.

“You threw him down and told him your trouble; and before he had got free of his first fright, you saw who he was and left him.”

“Ay,” said Jerry again, with a shudder.

“You went up a mound in the brickfields?”

“Ay.”

“You went up and told your trouble to some one else. You didn't see that man following you and listening to you? No. Nor you didn't see that man looking at

you through that window, when you laid your crust out?"

"No," said Jerry.

"Well, he saw you, then; he saw all, and he came and knocked me up out of my bed, and we went in the night to Bassett and fetched Mercy. And that man fetched the best silver plate out of his father's house, and the best Christmas pasties and wine, and we three laid the feast together."

"And where is that man?" said Jerry, hardly noticing Mercy as she came from where she was feeding the children.

"When he had laid the feast, Jerry, he went outside."

"Is he there now?" said Jerry.

"Perhaps he is."

Jerry said nothing more, but went out.

Dan was there.

"Dan Harroway," said Jerry, "I've spoke words to you as I can't never take back, because they was true."

"I don't want you to take 'em back, Jerry Rouse," said Dan. "I know they were true."

"Then, Dan Harroway, though I can't take them words back, I can tell you this,—and that is, as this yer thing you've done this yer Christmas-eve has made me feel that for you I never felt for mortal man afore. You ain't only spread them fine wittles in there, but there's a somethin' you've brought anigh me as I've hungered for without knowin' it this many a year. I don't arst you to come in, I ain't worthy as you should come in; but, Dan Harroway, I should like to shake you by the hand, and I should like the little uns to thank you."

There! I suppose you guess the rest.

Of course Dan didn't go in then, nor let Jerry show him off to the children as the angel in topboots that had been sent to make these wonderful things out of the CRUST. Of course he didn't sit at the end of the table by Mercy all the time of the feast, and have those bright top-boots smeared all over afterwards by thankful dirty little hands. And of course Jerry got turned out by his landlord next day.



They were married, Dan and Mercy, when the blue hyacinths came round again; and you could smell nothing else from Gadshill-in-the-Fields to the church; and Mercy wore them in her hair.

THE FLOWER GIRL.

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THE FLOWER GIRL.

(As told by Old Vinegar at a Children's Christmas Party.)

ONCE upon a time—oh such an evil time!—for it was in the year eighteen hundred and sixty-nine—there lived a wretched old miser woman and her grand-daughter. They lived in the wickedest town in all the world,—London was the name of it. They lodged in a cellar, not a very long way from the Duke o' York's Column.

The old woman, Rachel Reeves, was seventy—sour, miserly, and cunning; her grand-daughter, little Patty, was seventeen—sweet, generous, and a fool.

The old woman stayed at home and did nothing but grumble about her poverty, and keep guard over her treasures. Little Patty earned a living for both of 'em. She sold flowers about the streets, and her face was pretty enough to make the idiots who care for such things lay out a penny on purpose to stop and stare at it.

Patty doted on her grandmother because she *was* her grandmother, and the only relation she had in the world; and the grandmother doted on the pennies that Patty brought home, because they saved her from having to take any from her stores. The other lodgers in that dark, wicked old house where Patty lived knew well when the flower girl had come home with her basket empty and her little linen pocket full; for on such days she'd burst in and dance down the cellar steps, singing and beating her basket against her fists, head, and knees, as if it was a tambourine, and the old miser's cracked voice 'ud be heard all over the house squealing,—

“Here she comes! Here's my rosebud, my precious Patty-cake! The Lord bless her!”

They knew too, did all in that house, when Patty came home with the basket far from empty, and the pocket far from full. They knew it by seeing her come down the steps, her basket under her arm, and a corner of her shawl to her eye, snivelling instead of singing—creeping instead of dancing, and they knew it by the miser yelling, “Hah, you limb! is that the game? The devil take you for a

lazy slut!" Then the basket would be seized and beat about Patty's head and shoulders; not like a tambourine, in this case, or if it was, then it was like a tambourine that at every stroke gave out most piercing wails of music, for the basket was a round, hard, common basket, well able to hurt in savage hands like the old miser's.

Hightly tighty, you're a-turning up your noses at the old woman, are you, you righteous little humbugs! Well now, for my own part, I rather take to her. I'd prefer a knave to a fool any day, and Patty was a right-down fool.

Why, I tell you the idiot stayed where she was from pure choice, or at least from the idiotic notion that it was her bounden duty to stick to her old granny through thick and thin, and give herself up to her,—heart, soul, and body; health, youth, and beauty.

She never gave it a thought that her eyes were so blue and bright for any other purpose than to wake at five in the morning, and hurry off to Common Garden Market for her flowers, or that her voice was sweet for anything but bargaining or calling out the names and prices of her flowers.

Yet she knew that she was pretty, and knew she could get married and be taken away any day she chose. No belle o' the season ever found herself in the presence of more lovers at a fashionable ball than Patty did when she went to bargain at Common Garden. There was a young man in the tater line, ready at the least kind look to lay his heart, and stock in trade, and donkey, at her feet. There had been a duel fought for her there too, not likely to be soon forgot, between a seedsman and a costermonger, the weapons being toolip bulbs and young sewoys.

Then there was the shoe-black,—Patty called him her millingerry admirer, because of his uniform;—there was the shoe-black by the Duke's Column, where Patty sat, who allowed only her out of all the flower or orange girls to offer flowers to his customers while he blacked their boots. And he wouldn't buy his dinner without Patty went along with him to the cookshop winder, and gave her opinion as to whether saveloys, black-pudding, pease-pudding, or roly-poly, looked most tempting on that partic'ler day. I think if the girl had any preference, it was for him; for the bites he made her take to prove the goodness of

her choice were very welcome to her hungry little mouth. But to one and all Patty behaved like a person as marrying was impossible to ; and all began to know that while the old miser lived her grand-daughter was bound to her and her wretched home and miserable starving sort of life; and no doubt they called her a fool, as I do with all my heart.

But I've got to prove her a greater fool yet, and to prove all those fools as believe in goodness and self-sacrifice being rewarded, and all that sort o' thing. Ah, bah, what bosh it is ! I'll show you how little Patty was rewarded. Oh yes, *I'll* show you !

It was one winter's night—p'raps it was Christmas time p'raps it wasn't; it made little difference down in that cellar where Patty lived—no guzzling and gorging *there*, whatever time it was. Well, Patty had sold all her basket full of winter wilets, and lay sound, sound asleep, on her wretched bed.

But the miser was up. Yes, yes, up and sprightly was Rachel Reeves—up and at high feast. You needn't lick your chops, little greedies ; she had nothing to eat.

No, nothing to eat, though she sat on the floor with a soup tureen before her, an old chaney teapot beside her, and all sorts of other things that you'd think had eatables in them. But they hadn't, they had money in 'em,—some had copper, some had silver, and some had gold; and she'd dragged 'em all up from a hole in the floor, and this was what she feasted upon with her wicked, ravenous old eyes, and her wicked, ravenous old heart.

She feasted with delight, but with fear too and trembling; for she felt there was danger in exposing her hoards even to the light of her own wretched guttering candle. She knew there were men in the very same house,—which I have said before was a wicked, dark-looking house; she knew there were men there who, if they guessed her secret, would soon make use of it.

She was just drawing her hand full of silver from an old stocking, and trembling all the time, and peering up at the door, when suddenly that door opened, quietly and slowly, and a man stood there,—a huge fellow, with desperate gloating eyes fixed on her treasures.

She crouched, she panted, she glared at him.



He came into the room. He took some steps towards her.

"Patty! Patty!" she gasped.

The girl awoke in an instant. No mother ever responded readier to her baby's cry than that poor fool did to the least sound of the miser's voice.

She woke; she saw the man stoop as if to seize something; she saw the miser rise and rush at him, and his arm raised to strike her;—and then, one instant, one bound across the floor, and Patty was between them!

He tried to put her on one side. Thief as he was, he didn't wish to hurt the soft, brave, helpless little fool.

But she struggled so hard and desperate, and shrieked so loud, he grew wild, and struck at her,—hard and harder and harder!—till she fell at his feet, cold, white, and still.

His hand was clutching the gold in the tureen, and his eyes were on her face, when its whiteness and its stillness made him draw his hand back empty, mutter an oath, and fly.

"Patty! Patty!" cried the miser, cramming her



treasures back into the hole, "I hear them moving upstairs; they'll be here before I've hid it all! Help, Patty! Help!"

But Patty's help was never to be had no more.

She lay there just where she had been struck down —cold and white and still.

When the miser found this out, she raised the whole house with her screams.

She didn't feel such particular horror at the thoughts of losing Patty; but the idea of losing Patty's pennies was more than she could bear.

Nearly all the lodgers in the house came down, though not before the miser had stored away her tureen, teapot, and stocking, and all the rest of it, and shut the trap-door; and when they came they found her wailing and wringing her hands over the flower girl, and asking Heaven if she was to be left to starve in her old age and helplessness.

They lifted Patty up, and laid her upon the bed. They thought that she was quite dead; but they were wrong. She wasn't dead, yet she worn't far off it. She was able

in a little while to turn about and smile thanks and good-byes to her friends, which at this hour were many. It's wonderful how cheap friendship is when death is nigh. I suppose it's because so little is like to be wanted of it, and that for so short a time.

Every one in the house began to discover how much they had loved poor Patty, and Patty was very grateful for their discoveries. She was always a fool, you know.

But by-and-by, as she got weaker, she seemed to forget that any one besides her grandmother was in the room ; and began to talk to her in a low, faint voice, that set all a-crying, and there was some toughish ones amongst 'em, too.

"Granny," she said, after she had lain still for some time with the tears creeping quietly down her white meek face,—“Granny, I've been a-thinkin' about my gents,—my reg'ler customers, I mean, as goes by the Duke's Column. I didn't think never to see 'em no more. They's been very kind to me. I wished they knowed, granny, as I'm a-goin' off, along of them flowers as I sold 'em this mornin'. I wonder if they'd be sorry, granny, and not chuck 'em away quite so soon ?”

"No, no. You ain't a-dying, Patty," said the old hag. "You'd never be took from me, and me left to starve, sure-ly."

The flower girl sighed and shut her eyes.

By-and-by she opened 'em again, and said, "Granny, I wonder if you can see the Column from where I'm a-goin'. I shud like to very much. I shud like to see if my gents looks for me where I used to be. There's one—ah, gran'—there's one I've often, often wished to be a lady for the sake of. Can you get to be a lady up in heaven, I wonder? Well; they was all very good to me, and I thanks 'em kindly, and we must forgive our trespasses; and if they has took advantage sometimes of my bein' a lonesome poor girl, to tease me as they didn't ought, I know I've been much wickeder to them, a-calling out 'sweet wilets' when I knowed they had no smell, and wirin' up rotten camillies and roses as wouldn't last an hour, and sellin' 'em for fresh gathered! Ah, I've been a wicked gal."

She lay still then for some time, muttering about trespasses bein' forgiven. And then seemed to fall

asleep, and didn't rouse again till her time had come to go.

She went very quietly, just moving her hand as if she was pushing flowers to somebody, and moanin' faint and low,—

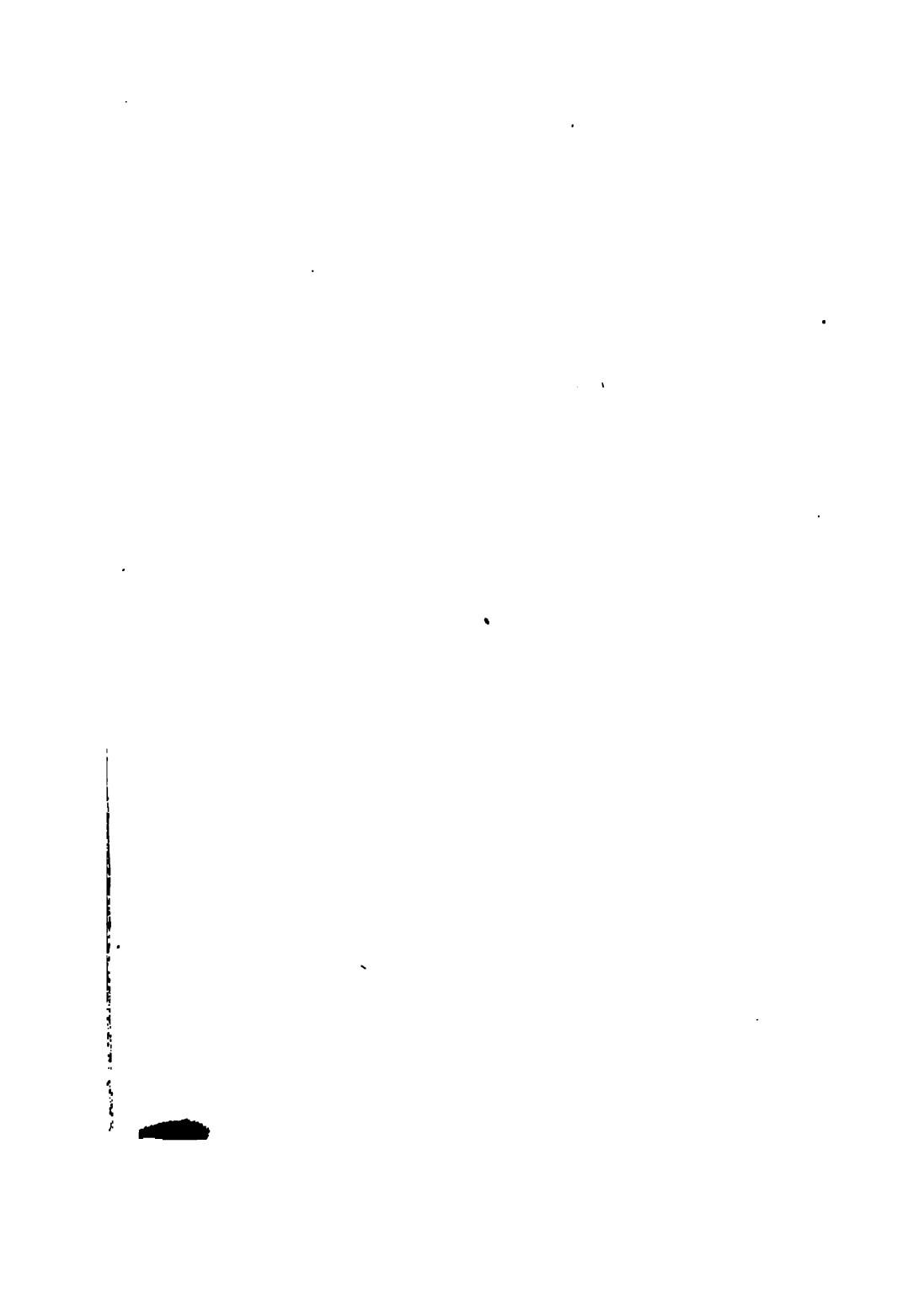
“ Do take 'em, sir ; you shall ha' the three for tuppence —'cos they're the last in the basket, and I wants to get home.”

So Patty died, and they saw her no more at Common Garden Market or at the Duke's Column. The old miser lives and thrives in the way most agreeable to her ; and the man who caused Patty's death has never been found out yet, and most likely never will be.

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THE WATCHMAN'S STORY.



THE WATCHMAN'S STORY.

We won't say exactly how many years ago, but by no means quite lately, two men were sitting by the fireside in the watchman's room at Mugginses. The same that is my room now? Right you are, Mrs. Amos, the very same. Some of you little uns know it—to be sure you do. Well; it was just as it is now, only that the collection of royal portraits over the mantel-shelf has had various additions. The peacock's feather was there, likewise the black profile of my own lineaments in early manhood, likewise the framed and glazed letter of acknowledgment from the firm to myself, written on the occasion of my circumventing the attempt at robbery one Sunday night.

Well; it was Christmas Eve, and two men were sitting over the fire. One was nigh upon fifty, and the other was turned of seventy. The one that was nigh upon fifty was acting as I am now—or as I should be—as the night watchman of Muggins. He had on him a watchman's cloak like

mine, and I am bound to say the watchman's cloak and the watchman's room (with coals and candles found in a cupboard handy to the fire), and the watchman's calling altogether, was thoroughly disgraced by him.

He didn't wear spectacles, or I should say a party unmentionable among Amalgamated Robins had made 'em, and made 'em so as nothing but evil could be seen through them. For of all the evil seers and evil thinkers, that chap in the watchman's cloak sitting by my fire on that before-named Christmas Eve, was the worst that ever was blessed with a pair of eyes in this world.

He saw no good nowhere. He suspected every mortal thing of being no better, but a good deal worse, than it should be.

He suspected Mugginses of robbing him by not giving him as much as *they* knew he deserved, though his wages were quite as good as *he* thought he deserved ; and he suspected all the world of designing to rob Mugginses.

It had brought him to a pretty pass, this suspicion ; for once upon a time he had not been used to sit beside his fire alone with his old father at the cheerful Christmas season.

He had had a wife—a pretty soul—as pretty I'll warrant as e'er a one of your Cinderellas and princesses in your fairy books, little uns—prettier perhaps than *they* 'ud look dressed as a poor man's wife—neat and smooth-haired; and I'll take the liberty to believe, much cleverer at a make-shift dinner, or turning old things new, without no connection whatever with fairy godmothers, as never ran in her family or the watchman's either.

Well; he was proud of her and fond of her, but he was suspicious of her, of course, as he was of everything else. Ah! he was an old Tartar for jealousy, he was. If his pretty wife was merry and gay, and went singing about the place, he said to himself, “Hah, hah, what does that mean? What has she to be merry about, with an ugly old husband like me?—there's something in that.” If she was sad and quiet, he said to himself, “Hah, hah, what does *that* mean?—there's something in that.” Oh, he led the pretty soul a life, did that old Turk. And at last there came a day when it was too much for her, and she could bear no more of it. She told him so, and that she would go away and never never come back; that she would go

and earn her bread in peace, and her little children's bread; for they had three then—one just born.

"I will go," says she, with eyes flashing at the watchman brighter than Cinderella's crystal slippers a-footing it along with the prince; "and some day, when hard work and sorrow shall have made my eyes dim and cheeks pale, and all is gone that makes you suspect me and torment me, p'raps then I may come home, and we may be at peace."

"No," says the watchman, glad of the capes that hid from her the thumping of the heart that, wicked and stubborn as it was, loved her dear,—"No," says he; "go once, and you go for ever—take my childr'n from me once, and you take them for ever!"

"I will not forget your words," says she; and her anger seemed to scorch up the tears that her eyes were full of, and turn 'em all to light and glitter. "I'll not forget your words. Go I will; and in sorrow, in sickness, or in hardest want, I'll not forget your words."

He gave her harder words than those to remember; and they parted, and the parting seemed as bitter and as much or ever and ever as if death had caused it.

The years went by, and the watchman was a lonely man—lonely yet not quite alone. He repented of his hardness, and wished, till wishin' made him thinner and sourer and uglier than he was a'ready,—he wished for the pleasant and well-liked face back again, and the little feet patterin' here, there, and everywhere,—he wished for them back again.

But whenever he *did* feel in his heart half fain to go and find 'em and bring 'em home, that evil sperrit of his, that suspiciousness, held him back, and put it to him that he'd best be as he was, lonesome, miserable, trusting nothing or nobody, and so safe from ever being deceived by anything or anybody.

And so the long years dragged on to that time, that Christmas Eve, when, as I told you, the watchman sat with the old man in the room that is mine now.

Who was that old man? Ah! little uns, I could almost wish him here; *he* was a one for Christmas; *he'd* keep your little eyes a-twinkling, and laugh the colour into your little cheeks, *he* would. He *did* dearly love old Christmas. Somehow, turkey and puddin' and plums, and in fact

everything good on the face of the earth kept its flavour for him to the last. Where's the young legs 'ud dance his old uns down at Christmas time? Not here; no, not elsewhere neither. Where's the young fingers quicker than his old uns at diving in the snapdragon? Not here; no, not elsewhere neither. Where's the rich purse opener to charity than his poor one? Look where you will, you'll never find it—no. I'll back his little wash-leather again a royal treasury!

Well; I haven't come yet to who he was. I am ashamed—for the watchman's sake—I am ashamed to say he was his father—ashamed, because the old man's good heart and jolly temper'ment leaves so little excuse for his having grown up such an old rascallion. There was only one excuse for him, and it's being the only one, I won't deprive him of it. It was this. His father was so uncommon *unsuspicious*, and had so many times got into hot water through his *unsuspiciousness*, that it was an over-anxiety to avoid this fault which may be said to have first driven the watchman into his much greater and uglier fault.

The old man had been Mugginses watchman in his day,



and never was man more liked and respected; so much so that when with advancing years his unsuspiciousness and his simple trust in his fellow-creatures got past putting up with, the firm couldn't bear to turn him off. They couldn't bear to do it, for they knew his whole heart was in his work, and that the more unfit he got for it the more he clung to it. So one of the firm—my hat is off now, or I should uncover at this nameless mention of him—so one of the firm talks it over with the old man's son, and arranges to put it to the old man in this way. The old man is to be told that he is now wanted to occupy a more important position—that the firm have decided to make him general custodian of the place, and to make his son the night-watchman. He thought it grand—he thought he was watching and guiding everything, and little dreamt everybody was watching him, and gently turning nearly all he said or did to no account. The gentleman who made this arrangement would sometimes, when he had a bit of a message or errand of no importance, call the old man, and say, "Now I don't like to trust this matter to any one but you and

'im. I know how valuable your time is, but I think I must get you to do it for me."

Never was such a kindly twinkle in any man's eye as in that gentleman's while he watched the old man strut off as consequential as if he'd been sent to order all the diamonds of what's-its-name, Golcondas, to be sent in so many bales to Mugginses warehouse instanter.

That gentleman is now only a sleeping partner—a very soundly sleeping partner in the churchyard here—and the old man he was kind to is not far from him. As he was dying, he says, says he, "I hope they'll lay me nigh the gate, and then I shall feel like his watchman still."

Now, on the night I'm speaking of, it went sorely against the grain with the watchman's father to sit there in the watchman's room, with only the watchman's own gloomy face opposite him—no little mouths nigh to fill with good things, no little feet to set a-patterin' round the room, no little hands to blindfold his poor old eyes that couldn't already see too well, no little forms to struggle and laugh

when he caught them ; and here was nothing of all this—nothing—and so he sat and moped.

“ Why don't you get your ale to warm, and make yourself comfortable, father ? ” says his dutiful son.

“ Ay, ay, we must be comfortable : we mustn't forget it's Christmas, must we ? ” says the old chap, rousing up and trying to look lively. “ I'm glad you reminded me ; for I had fell a-thinking, and I don't want to do that.”

“ Why don't you ? ” the watchman asks him. “ I don't see what there is better for you to do.”

“ Well,” says his father, shaking his head, and looking at him with his old grey eyes that only showed his honest simple old heart clearer as they showed the world dimmer to him ; “ well,” says he, “ I don't think it's good for an old man to have much to do with his own thoughts ; younger folks' thoughts and words is better company for him ; his own is apt to get a trifle musty—*mine* has been a trifle so to-night.”

“ What d'ye mean, father, by that ? ” asks the watchman.

“ Well,” says Capes senior, as he was called about

the place, "now first tell me your thought on what I've bin a-thinkin' of, and then I tell you mine. Am I—am I of any use here, Joseph?" (I won't swear the watchman's name *was* Joseph, but Joseph's a very good name, so we will let it *be* Joseph.)

"What's up now?" answers the watchman; "*you* of any use, indeed! I wouldn't like to have much to do on these here premises without—but what's put anything of *that* kind in your head?"

"There! now you see I'm right, Joseph," says Capes senior, all bright and lively again. "That's *your* thought, and that's everybody's, too, isn't it? Don't you think it is, Joseph?"

"Rather," says the watchman.

"Well, Joseph; do you know, as I was sitting here, thrown upon my own thoughts,—they was worse than damp sheets to me, they was, and struck up cold, Joseph, they did, and sent it through me with a chill and a shiver, that I was gettin' very old, Joseph, and that I was being put—put up with, Joseph, rayther than bein' made real use of."

"Well; how you could ha' sat there a-thinking such bosh, *I can't understand,*" says the watchman.

"No, you can't Joseph, I dessay. I can't myself; but I sha'n't think any more about myself. I don't do it well. Other folks does it for me so much better and kinder, and they're right—of course they are. It stands to reason, don't it, Joseph? They have a correcter view of me than I have of myself."

"Yes, yes; but you'd better get to bed, father," the watchman says, impatient by this time of trying to be a little amiable; besides, it was time for him to be starting on his rounds, and his ears were beginning to prick up sharp, and his eyes to goggle and glare, as much as to say—"Now, then, if there's anything bad to be seen, trust *me* for seeing it."

He left the old man by the fire, and marched out into the wide passage, and often he would stop and listen, suspicious of the very echo of his own footsteps; and often he'd stop and stare suspicious at the wall where his own shadow had been going along, till the sudden turn of his lantern had frightened it away.



And when he got into the great room, the chief store of all, what a peering round the bales there was, and what suspicions that this was smaller than usual, and this bigger, and t'other bumpier; and what a thumping with the loaded head of his stick to make sure the bumps were not heads, or to make sure they shouldn't ever more be much good *as* heads, if heads they were.

Then how artfully he'd stand still and listen when he'd come out of the room, and make his lantern dark, only to suddenly burst the door open again, and turn his lantern on, to surprise—I can't tell you what, and I don't suppose he could neither, unless it was the spiders venturing down their stairs after having bin frightened up into their top attics by him; or some unlucky mouse that had come out to go on playing with its shadder in the moonbeams on the floor.

Then he shut the door and went down into the great solitary room below, where the windows had iron bars, and where the shadows of slender iron pillars dodged the watchman's eyes as he moved his lantern about; and where there was a circ'lar staircase to the very top o'

the house, and a well for the lift that let things down to the big underground rooms, or brought them up from those rooms, which was the most crowded of any.

Now while the watchman, or Capes junior, as we may as well call him (being the name he was mostly known by on the premises in those days)—now, while Capes junior was going his rounds in these rooms, insulting the very moonbeams by pouncing on them suddenly with his lantern, and popping round in pursuit of his own coat-tail, which he'd taken for something or somebody hiding behind him,—while he was carrying on these games, and others likewise ridiculous, what should come a-sounding through the place, from top to bottom, but a knock at the door,—yes, at the great iron-plated door just behind the very spot where Capes junior was cutting round after his own coat-tail.

Up, straight as a dart, stiff as a poker, stands Capes junior now, listening.

“Who is it? What is it can have knocked at *that* door at such a time? for except when goods are coming in or going out, it's never used.”



Here *was* something for Capes junior to be suspicious about, and he didn't act otherwise than up to the occasion.

His first move, after being still and listening, was to hop from mat to mat, quiet as a frog in a muddy lane, to the foot of the stairs, and there stand and consider. His next was to hop from mat to mat back again to the door, and there stand and consider.

This ended in his deciding to open the door.

It was a small sort of a knock for such a big man to make so much fuss about answering, and to see him catch hold of the handle and lean his head forwards, and have his lantern ready to light up the first breath of air that came in, must have been a sight to make the littlest of you young uns laugh. And it wasn't fear, you know; it was something that made him look uglier than fear could have made him look. You know what it *was*, little childr'n—*suspicion*. Just so. *That's what made him hold his stick and lantern like a wicked ogre going to pounce on half a dozen of you for his supper.* There, there, don't be frightened, he shan't get you; but *that's what made him*



whip the door open and stand looking out with glaring lantern and glaring eyes. Oh ! he must a' looked a beauty, *he* must. I don't doubt as all the capes of his watchman's coat bristled up with suspicion like a turkey-cock's feathers, as he stood heavin' his evil 'earted chest, and gripping his wicked knobby stick at the top o' them steps.

And now the door's open, and he's all prepared for the very blackest visitor as ever knocked at Mugginses door, on business or otherwise. What does he see ?

At first nothing but the deep stone arch over the steps, and the full moon a-turning *her* light on him as he was a-turning *his* light on *her*, only in rayther a sweeter sort o' way.

Was he more easy in his mind, you'll wonder—did he laugh and leave off looking fierce ? Not a bit of it. His suspiciousness, like a wild beast baulked of food, only got more savage.

The glaring lantern and the glaring eyes were turned lower, and he stooped, looking, no doubt, very like a turkey-cock now, laying his head to run at a sparrow.

What did he see then? Why, he saw two mites of things half-way down the steps, and going down as fast as it lay in the power of very small legs to go down very high steps. The light of the lantern fell on two little backs that had known no more than twelve years between them, and that were very small to have been burdened with even that number.

There was one in a boy's jacket and cap, which might have known eight years; and one in a tiny feminine frock and with tiny feminine curls which the moonlight and the watchman's lantern together made out to be gold as a guinea—that back was never a day over four, if so much, and never a bit of bonnet, no, not a mite.

And there they were, and down they went.

"Hi!" the watchman shouts. "You come back, you varments."

But down and down they go, making still more haste at his surly burly voice, and less speed—little frightened, dithering mites!

"Come back and give account of yerselves, or I'll shoot ye!" hollers wicked old Capes.



By this time the mites are at the bottom of the steps, and at this horrid threat they shake and turn round as quick as possible.

"Come back with yer!" roars Capes.

And up they come, obedient—holding hands and climbing away as fast as ever their knees can be doubled and straightened.

They stand now close to the glaring lantern, and looking up at the savage old eyes of the wicked watchman.

The wicked watchman, he looked at them, and the deuce a bit *he* knows what to make of 'em.

The boy's black eyes were as full of fright as eyes could be, but not a cowardly fright—a desperate sort of fright, that had something threatening in it; he did fix a look on old Capes, and set his white lips and gripped his little sister's hand, as if he was trying to bring all his little powers into a sting to strike into whatever might touch *her*. As for her, she was right down dazed by the light of the watchman's lantern on her frightened, sleepy little face; and seeing the staring was likely to last for time uncertain', she lolled her little head wearily up agin her brother,

stuck her thumb into her mouth and began to suck it, while keepin' her tired wet blue eye on the watchman, and as it were a-waiting resigned for the wust.

"Who are you—you young wagabonds?" shouts the watchman, in such a voice that the sucking stops, and the boy's white lips begin to tremble, firm as he sets 'em.

He is too ill and frightened and cold to make any answer, to do anything, but give stare for stare and grip his sister's hand harder.

"Who *are* yer?" roars the watchman louder still; and then little yaller hair lifts her head up and moves it from side to side, side to side, like a bit of a flower worried by a nor'east wind, and looks at the watchman, and says, in a way part caressingly and part frightened and part impatient at the stoopidity of strangers, and with it all, un-common sleepy and fretful,—

"It's 'Enery and me."

"'Enery and you!" says the watchman; "and who the doose is 'Enery and you, with your imperence?"

Just then Capes senior, lively as a cricket at the sound

o' child'n's voices, comes creaking down the stairs fast as maybe.

"Lawks, Joseph, what little dears is these?" asks he.

"I'll little dear 'em if they don't speak up this instant and tell how they dares come here a-knocking at this door at this time o' night."

And the watchman pulls the boy in by the ear, and shuts the door, and whiffs the lantern round in his face, and says,—

"Now, then, if you don't find your tongue, young gentleman, it may so be you won't find this yer *hear* when you comes to look for it."

And he pulls it till the red comes into the boy's bit of a white face; and little yaller hair pulls her thumb out of her mouth again, and catches hold of a mite of the watchman's cuff, and shakes it fierce and cries pitiful.

"Let be, Joseph, let be," says the old man, his old hands reglerly trembling as he drew the little uns away from his son; then says he,—

"What's ever on this paper, Joseph?" It was pinned on the little gell's frock; and going down on his knees, the

watchman read and muttered out loud the words that were written on it:—

“The mother of these children trusts to God and good Christians they will not be left to starve in the streets this night, when He was born who said, ‘Suffer little children to come unto Me.’”

“And where's your mother, with her imperence ?” says the watchman, getting off his knees mighty angry.

Then the boy heaves his chest and moistens his lips, and speaks up,—

“Please, sir, she fell down a long way off; and a woman took her in, and she gave us this writin', and said it was to arst for some supper and somewhere to sleep.”

“Supper and sleep!” says the watchman. “Well, you're a cool un, you are! What the dooce is to be done with 'em, father?”

“Well,” Capes senior answers, taking little yaller hair up in his arms, “I shu'd say a foundation of treacle porridge foller'd up with bread and cheese—myself—Joseph.”

“What, feed and harbour vagabonds !” says the watch-

man. "No, no, father—none a' that. Come out with yer! and tell your mother this sort o' trick won't do, and she'll find herself in gaol to-morrow, if she don't mind."

The old man begged and prayed, the boy crammed his fist in his eyes, and yaller hair clung tight round the old man's neck, and laying her cheek against his, sucked her thumb and looked at the watchman as she might at some naughty little boy whose doin's she was ashamed of.

They got the better of him, and he had to give in and see his old father mount the stairs to his room with the gell in his arms, and the boy limping up with bare feet beside him.

The watchman came after, growling and grumbling so that the child'n kept peeping back at him, half-frightened out of their wits.

He would scarcely have been got over by them; he would have held out and sent 'em off into the wind and cold to fare as they might; but a thought came to him that made him think he'd better let the old man have his way,—a thought of how, for what he knew, his own little ones might be a-begging somebody's charity in the same way,

and shelter from the cold; so he contented himself with grumbling up the stairs after them, instead of turning them out.

He wouldn't lend a hand, though, with the supper. No,—the old man did it all, and did it in rare style, too; warming and comforting the little creatures, body and soul, in a way wonderful to see.

Bless you, little yaller hair got quite confidential with the old man in no time, chattering away about some Bush Common School, which it seems was a work'us school, and out of which they had just come. The watchman didn't know why he turned his face away from him, and kept it turned away when she began to talk like that. He thought it was because his kind, tender old heart was touched over much by the hardships that the child let out about in the simplest gossip you ever heard.

There was no treacle or sugar in the gruel at Bush Common School, she told Capes senior, as he dropped the treacle in all sorts of fine patterns on her porridge; and then, as he laid his hand on her hair a-glittering so in the firelight, she apologized for its being so short, and explained

that whenever there was illness in Bush Common School all the children had their hair cut off and their gruel made thinner. In her innercent prattle she let out there was always illness at Bush Common School, no matter how short they cut the hair, or how thin they made the gruel.

"There's one good thing, though, in Bush Common School," says she, nodding at the old man in a knowing way.

"And what's that, Poppets?" says he.

"A good many gets to 'eaven from there," says she, nodding harder.

"How's that?" says he.

"Washed there on thin gruel?" asks the watchman.

"Well, I had a brother went to 'eaven from there," says she, "with a bad 'ead and a fever."

"Did you now?"

She nodded, and told us about it.

"First," says she, "nobody wouldn't tell mother where he was when she came to see us. He wasn't in the school, and nobody u'd tell us where he was, and mother said she would see him, and she'd send the bobbies after him if they

didn't give him up. Then they told her he'd gone to 'eaven, and so she didn't send the bobbies after him there, cos they wouldn't a' bin let in if she had."

The surly watchman laughed at this, and asked if *he* would be let in, and she told him very positive that he would not, unless he went to Bush Common School and died first; which he said he'd rather be excused.

Well, after supper the old man drew the watchman o' one side, and wrangled and coaxed it out of him that they should have a bit of a bed made up in the room below where he would be a-passing through oftener than anywhere else, and able to keep his eye upon them; for I have been ashamed to own before that he had all along bin suspecting that they had been smuggled in by thieves for the boy to open the door in the night, the little girl being with him just to turn off suspicion. So the bed was made, and they were laid in it; and all by Capes senior, without the watchman putting his hand to a thing.

After that, the watchman could not get his father to go to bed likewise, as he much wished he would; but he sat drivellin' and foolin' over old times, which was what the

watchman never *could* stand, and which to-night was uncommon disagreeable to him. He mumbled and grumbled about the little strangers downstairs, and then about his own grandchild'n, and what a *shame* it was he should be without 'em in his old age.

"These little creatures reminds me of 'em so, Joseph," he says; "why, the boy's much the size our Harry must be by now, please God he lives. Ay, we called our 'Enery Harry, didn't we? This one is called 'Enery, ain't he?"

"Hold your tongue with your 'Enerys and your Harrys," says the watchman, "can't you?"

It was beyond bearing to him to hear the old names—that he'd never spoke for years, and yet that were once so often on his tongue.

Before long the old man was at it again, muttering to himself.

"Poor little 'Enery," and "black-eyed 'Enery," and a lot more about 'Enery, till the watchman caught him up sharp again.

"What *is* it you're a-harpin' on?" says he.

"Lawks, Joseph, don't ketch me up like that," he says,

looking half frightened. "I was only a-thinking of the old song," and he hummed, in his shaky voice,—

"'Enery, 'Enery courted me,
Under my father's cherry-tree."

Now it happened that just as the watchman was in hopes he was going to bed, the old man was taken with one of his fits of fussyness and consequence, and must needs insist on going out to "look around," as he called it, and see that all was safe: a piece of business which always made it necessary for the watchman to go out afterwards unknown to him to see that he had left no door unlocked, or otherwise done any mischief.

He was a long time gone to-night—an uncommon long time—so long that the watchman got more really uneasy than he had been for many a month—I may say many a year.

What could be keeping him?

At last it all came over him that his first suspicions were not going to turn out a mere nothing, as usual. What if these child'n *had* been smuggled in by thieves? what if the rascals were waiting outside, and Capes senior had come

upon them, and tried to make for the watchman to give the alarm, and been caught, and was in their power now ?

With these thoughts and fears getting more and more hold on him, the watchman took his lantern, and went, quiet as he could tread, to the place where the children lay. When there, he saw that if the supposed burglars were depending on the boy doing anything for them, there would certainly be no robbery at Mugginses *that* night, for he was as sound asleep by his little sister as if he were in the peacefullest home that ever was.

But then again, thinks he, they may *not* be depending on him now ; he may have done all they wanted him to do, and they may now be only biding their time to break in.

What *can* keep the old man so long ?

Hark ! The watchman hears a noise upstairs—a noise like the dragging of one of the heavy bales.

Up he goes swift, careful, lantern darkened, stick in hand.

Not a soul to be seen, or heard now. But what is that on the floor ? An old bonnet ! Where on earth can it

have come from? While he looks at it there is a noise below in the passage.

Down he goes, swift, careful, lantern darkened, stick in hand.

By the time he gets down all is quiet again. Not a soul to be seen but the children in their bed.

Was it at all likely that the boy could be pretending? He holds the lantern glaring in his face, but his black eye-lashes never flinch; they seem glued to his white cheek—white still, though not so haggard as when he came.

Standing looking at them, the watchman's arm suddenly begins to tremble, so that he is obliged to hold his lantern with both hands. What is it he sees in the two worn, wasted little faces, as they lay asleep? He looks deep-like into them,—not for themselves, but as you might look into the sea—not for itself, but for the moon reflected in it; so he looked into the little faces for a something sweeter and dearer than themselves that he sees there,—the likeness of the face that had been the one face of the world to him.



He sets his lantern down ; he kneels beside them, muttering,—

“Lord Almighty, what is this ? ”

“Joseph, you'll not be angry with me, will you ? ” says the voice of Capes senior, behind him. “It's all my doings ; but you will forgive me, won't you, Joseph ? ”

“Father, father,” cries the watchman, “these are my children, and you've brought them here because—because she's dead.”

“Joseph, she is living ; she is here.”

The watchman rose and turned, and saw once again before him—once again looking at him, meek and loving—the wife he had liked so well and used so ill.

She stretched her thin arms towards her children, and said,—

“See, my arms are too weak to hold 'em all to life. One has slipped from me. Oh, forgive me for his loss, and help me, oh, help me, with these that are left, and my own poor breakin' heart ! ”

The watchman laid the weary head once more on the capes that were never again to bristle up with the wicked

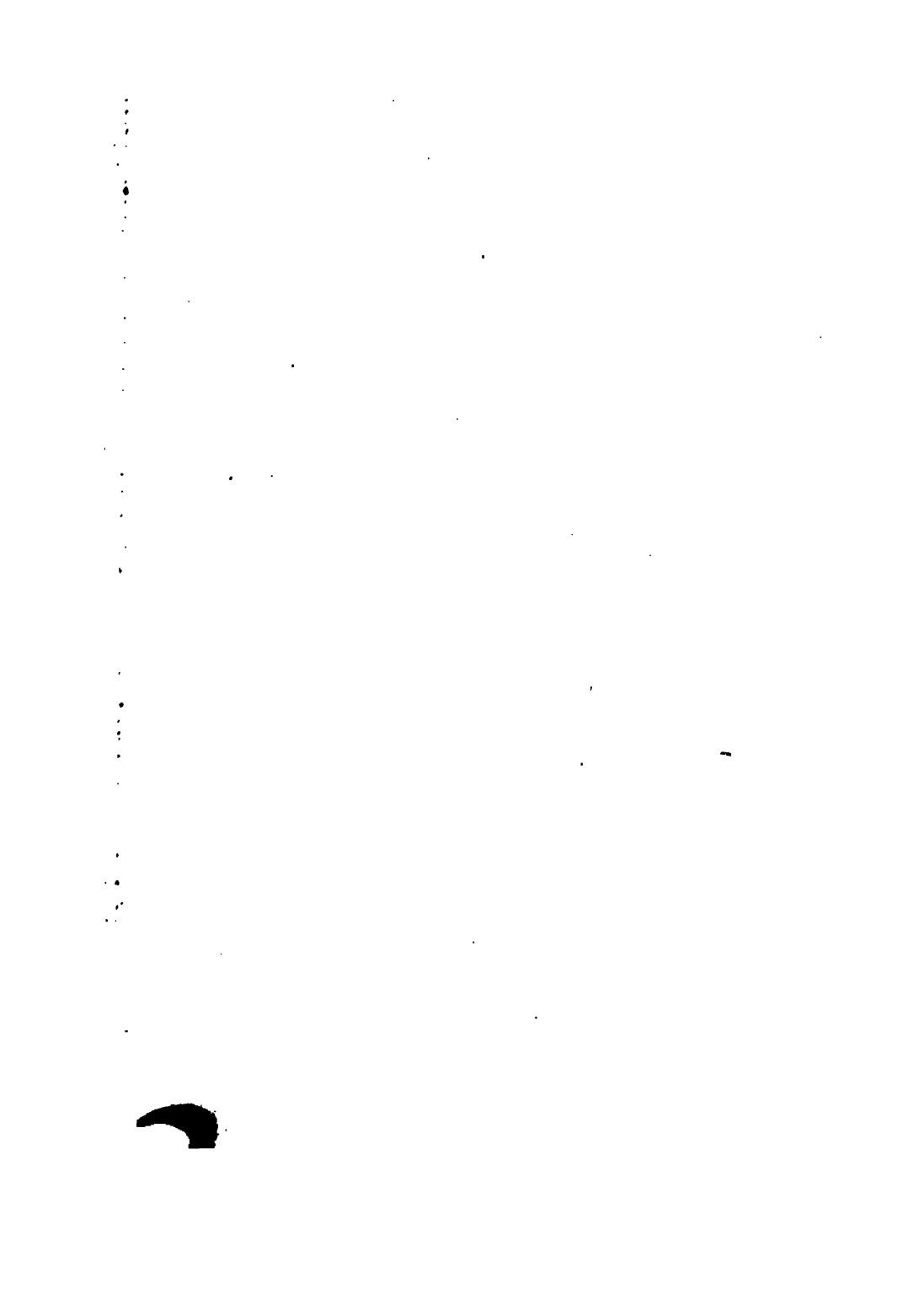
jealous feelings of times past, and told her if she would try and care for him again, and trust him, he would never, never doubt her more, or the Almighty's mercy.

"I don't care now," says Capes senior, "whether I am of real use, or whether I'm only put up with here, Joseph. I've got my heart's wish now, I have. I've bin of use to you, and I'm ready to go whenever I'm called."

He was spared long to us. Well, yes, I *am* Capes junior, if you must know. Yes, he was spared long to us before that call came. Though he didn't live to see his great-grandchildren, his memory is as green with 'em as the holly-tree we put by his grave on which we had wrote,—

"Blessed are the peace-makers."

AN OLD LETTER.



AN OLD LETTER.

[*My mother, Christine Prior, is still remembered at M—— gaol; and it is likely to be many years before her wrongs, her angelic patience, and her sweetness of demeanour will die out of prison memories. Her story, as known to the world, is too widely known to need telling again in many words. She was, at the age of twenty-one, sentenced to imprisonment for life, for the destruction of her deaf and dumb child. Her husband was at the time engaged in India, during the mutiny of 18—, and failed to get leave to return before his wife's trial was over, and when she had been in prison four months. It was afterwards found that the child's death had been caused by the nurse, who in sudden fear that its crying might be the means of betraying secrets which would have cost her her place, and ruined the highest of characters, had used violence which had unintentionally proved fatal. The fact, so well known among Captain and Mrs. Prior's friends, that the young mother had suffered a morbid*

grief over the child's infirmity, and had been heard to wish he might not live for his father to see him, tempted the terror-stricken woman to accuse her mistress of his death. How well and how far the scheme succeeded is well known. My mother, in her loneliness and horror, lost all power of self-defence. The evidence against her seemed to her friends so overwhelming, the utmost they hoped to do for her was to prove her insanity. In this they failed, but her life was spared. It is a portion of a letter written by her to myself, some forty years after her trial, that I wish those friends to read. It describes her first meeting with my father after his return from India, when he came to see her in the prison, while still supposed by every one to be guilty.

WILLIAM PRIOR.]

. —I HAVE now exhausted all the little stock of news I had laid by for you since the last Indian mail went out, and yet, my dear boy, it is only here that the letter I intended to write you really begins. I can plainly see in the newspapers what you had been trying to keep from me—that by the time this reaches you, you will be in ——, perhaps face to face with the enemy. Why

did you fear to tell me? Did you forget your mother was a soldier's widow? At such a time you would, no doubt, dear Will, expect that, in writing to you of your father, I should remind you of all the instances I can remember of his great courage; but, instead of this, I want now to tell you of the one and only occasion on which I ever knew it to fail him utterly.

I know that you have never heard my account of that hour so eventful to us both; and your father's descriptions of it were always, *for me*, spoiled by the ridicule he threw upon his own conduct.

You remind me in your last how often I have promised you my own poor description of that event; and, that I may have the less reluctance to revive such memories, you tell me of the sympathy you hear expressed for us whenever allusion is made in your presence to the time when that blot was on our name. You cannot doubt that it is peculiarly gratifying to me to hear this is the case in the country where your father first heard of my imputed crime, and, as soon as honour allowed him, laid down all his bright hopes of glory to hasten to my deliverance and comfort.

I shall trust, my dear boy, that in describing to you that meeting—in laying before you word for word, look for look, thought for thought—the vividness of my remembrance shall atone for the unfitness of your mother's pen for such a task. Ah, Will! unfit indeed it is to do anything like honour, even justice, to him who may now no more speak of it, unless he does so to *me*, as I sometimes love to fancy he does, in the vague, sweet language of the churchyard flowers; or in the sunshine that sometimes, as I stand beside his grave, breaks over it, seeming to me to come straight from his gallant heart, that *still* cannot refrain from offering me, from the very dust, *some* comfort for my tears.

I can feel the very chill that fell on me as I came from my cell into the passage, to go with the matron towards the room where he was waiting. I had but two days before left the infirmary, and my weakness was such as to render me incapable of walking without assistance. My mind was nearly as weak as my body; but the excited state I was in gave me a feeling of almost terrible clearness of judgment, so that I was perfectly certain I should know the truth as to your father's conviction of my innocence or

guilt the instant I saw him. The possibility, the danger, of making any mistake did not occur to me. It was nothing to me at that moment whether my innocence should ever be proved to the world, or not. It was nothing to me whether my dreary and sometimes maddening prison-life should drag on to its fullest length, after this meeting. The one and only question that had place within me was, whether my soul was alone in the awful darkness and chaos into which my life by a cruel blunder had been turned, or whether that brightest and bravest of spirits had been with mine from the first, and would be to the end.

I had never once utterly lost faith in *his* faith in my innocence; but the shock my reliance on friends had received, the suddenness and the cruelly mysterious nature of these sorrows that had come upon me one after another, seemed by that time to have left no feeling in me but one of wild questioning anticipation of what more *could* come. You can guess the answer that haunted me as I dragged along my crushed life through the strange dreary days, and the nights more strange and dreary still. You can guess it. Your father's loss of faith in me. But I would not

accept it. If God had sent me the thought as a gentle warning of what was to come, I told myself He would not be angry with me if I preferred not to take such warnings, but to wait and let myself be utterly crushed by the blow itself, *if it must come.*

The matron opened the door and led me into the room.

I saw first the prison-doctor, who had attended me during my two serious illnesses, and who rose as I entered — a mark of respect so new to him towards his prison patients that I looked at him with half-unconscious surprise, lifting my hand to my forehead, and pausing to ask myself of what this might be ominous.

He seemed to remember himself with some confusion; and came forward in his customary manner, to ask me almost sharply if I had taken some mixture he had sent me, and to tell me that, if I was not careful to keep myself quiet through this interview, my visitor would not be allowed to come a second time.

I had kept my eyes upon the doctor's face since entering the room, not looking for that other presence of which, however, I was fully aware.

The doctor had scarcely ceased speaking to me before I noticed that he drew away a little, rather quickly. The matron let my hand slip from her arm and stood aside too leaving me to meet your father who was approaching me.

It was then I raised my eyes and looked at him, and saw that it had not pleased God to write His mercy on his face in the manner I had prayed, demanded, felt nearly sure He would; and so I thought that mercy was denied me, and that all which might happen from that moment was of small account indeed. The pale, boyish, sensitive face I knew so well, the gentle impetuous eyes, bright with the heart's brave faith, looked on me no more. I had no power to reason with myself; to think how the first experiences of war, the shock of *my* sorrow, must have told on such a nature—how much in these two years the world, before all smiles for him, had now taught him of her wrongs and anguish; I could only yield myself to the despair that overcame me at the sight of that brown, thin face with its sunken eyes and newly-acquired sternness, through which I then could see none of the old tenderness remaining.

My feeble and overwrought brain told me that all the

change I saw had come of sorrow caused by my supposed guilt, not *only* by my misfortunes.

For a moment something impelled me to stretch out my hands and not suffer him to approach me; but as I did so, I felt my strength so forsaking me that, to keep myself from falling, I was forced to cling to his, which he held towards me hastily, as he perceived my sudden weakness.

He stood supporting me with his arm, slightly and tremblingly, even as he might have done a stranger who had demanded suddenly his pity and assistance, only that perhaps his arm trembled too much. I think that he said, “Christine!”—but I could not be sure whether it was that, or only a short almost sharp sigh which came from his lips. I think it *was* my name.

For the next moment or two—what an age it seemed to my disappointed and weary heart!—we stood looking down at our coldly linked hands, on which such a history of suffering was written. His was so seared and darkened, it seemed that instant but snatched from the black reek of battle, and mine lay on it more like a white skeleton leaf than a human hand.



There seemed to me, in that pair of hands alone, subject for endless thought and tears.

At last, with a sort of dull, apathetic curiosity as to his thoughts, I looked up in his face.

The tender pity which I saw there for my cruel fate—not for *me*, I told myself, but for my cruel fate—was more than I could bear. I turned my gasping mouth against his heart, and let it cry its bitter cry there, not in words, but only with a childish, passionate desire and half faith that its bitterness might penetrate and be in some degree understood at that seat of God's own justice and pity.

Your father no sooner heard my cry than he clasped me to that good heart, and kissed me with a torrent of affectionate words; but as there is no greater unrest to be found than on the heart we love and doubt, I tore myself away in passionate rejection of the love I needed so much—yet needed less than justice—and not a word of *that* had I caught in what he said, though my misery was all ear as he spoke.

I tore myself away, throwing up my clasped hands and straining vehemently back against his circling arm, while I cried in a voice I scarcely knew as mine,—

"No, no, no! Leave me! leave me!"

I heard him say,—

"Christine! Christine!" with what seemed to me something of the old dear voice; at which I cried in sharper anguish—this time casting my arms about his neck—"Leave me! leave me!" Then the room darkened to me. There came a dull din in my ears, and for a moment I lost consciousness.

Partly before I fainted, and partly as I came to my senses, I was aware of the matron and doctor taking me from your father, and busying themselves in trying to restore me. I heard the doctor saying in a whisper,—

"I told you it should not have been to-day. The slightest excitement is too much for her strength yet. I advise you even now, I beg of you, to leave her before she recovers."

Your father answered hurriedly,—

"No, I can't do that;" and then I felt him gently taking the heavy prison shoes from my feet.

When I opened my eyes I was seated in the matron's easy-chair, the doctor standing watching me with much

anxiety, the matron holding in her hand the little close-bordered prison cap she had taken from my head.

Your father still knelt at my feet, which he was chafing in his warm hands, while he gazed up at my closely cut hair that the removal of the cap had only just made apparent to him.

I sat very still, taking his surprise—so tender and pained—and his gentle services in proud humility.

At last he evidently became troubled by my *conscious* stillness and silence, and taking my hands said,—

“Come, Christine, why so silent? They told me you were too ill for me to come to you to-day. Tiny, darling, were they right?—and have I so shaken you that you will not speak to me?”

“What is there to say?” I asked, voicelessly, and closing my eyes in profound weariness. “*I know of nothing.*”

There was more than sadness in *his* silence. I could feel there was alarm before I heard him mutter to the doctor hastily,—

“Yes; she is worse than I dreamed of. What would I give if I had but waited!”

"And why?" I asked, rousing myself with a struggle, and leaning forward to gaze into his face as he knelt at my knees looking at me, forgetful of everything but my weak and strange state; "why would you have waited? Why is it not better over?"

"Over!" he repeated. "Christine, what is it that you say? Is not *what* better over?"

"This—that we both suffer at meeting," I answered. "It would have been better had you not come; but——"

"Better I had not come? Christine!"

—"But as from kindness to me; or," I added, retaining his hand, which he was about to draw away in surprise, "or perhaps in kindness to yourself—mistaken kindness to us both—you *have* come; do not, let me beg of you,—make it too—painful—for us both—by—by prolonging this."

Your father glanced from my face to the doctor's in passionate inquiry.

"Have you deceived me?" he asked. "Has she been worse than you have said? Christine, my darling, do you not know me?"

I laid my trembling hands as assuringly as I could upon his shoulder.

"Yes," I answered; "I do. I am not delirious. I have been so twice since I came here; but now I am calm and sensible of what is passing. Do you not believe it?"

"I do," he said in a changed voice. "And then, Christine, what else must I believe? That you are cold to me? In Heaven's name, why? What have I not done that I could do for your sake? And yet what wonder you should blame me and all the world for helplessness? *Have you blamed me much, Christine?* You shall yet learn if you have had true cause for *that*."

There was something in his voice just then, and in the return of the familiar smile to his lips and eyes, that made me suddenly wonder how I could have thought the face after all so very greatly changed. I began, as I gazed wistfully into it, to ask myself if, had I seen it thus when I entered the room, I should have been so sure that your father was not, after all, the very same to me.



After this thought, a hope more faint, yet sweeter than any words can express, made me stretch my hands out to your father, and exclaim,—

“Oh! that it might have been! O William! that it *might* have been!”

“Tiny, my darling!” he answered, “that *what* might have been?”

“What I always thought would be—that you would *know*—not only hope or think, but *know*.”

“Know what, Christine?”

“How wrong, how cruel, how wicked, all this is to me. How *insane*!”

“Well, and is it possible my wife thinks I do *not know* this?”

Taking my face in his hands, he looked steadily, joyfully into it.

How had the change come? How was I rendered unable to answer? I had indeed thought so. All I could do was to sob out like a child sobbing over past pain.

“Then why were you so different, so strange, so silent

and reserved? Ah! it must have been at first sight of me. My hair—my dress—they have made me look what they take me for: is that it? Ah! have I not had enough to bear to make me doubt everything—to make me think even God did not see I was innocent? and that even my little child, being dumb, could not tell Him how precious its little life was to me. So precious, that rather than *you* should look slightly upon it, I *have* said, it *is* true, I trusted rather than that should be, He might take it to Himself before you saw it. Ask yourself, William, have I not had enough to make me fear the worst? I *had* thought you like the rest of the world since you came in here, and *have* fearfully suffered."

I cannot describe to you your father's amazement and most tender remorse as he understood what I had been thinking and feeling.

"Have I been so cruel a blunderer, Tiny?" he said, after his eyes had filled my soul with peace. "It was not *my* fault; but they so enforced upon me the necessity of restraint and calmness, and—everything, in fact, unnatural and dangerous, because I come as I *know* my wife

must have expected me, a soldier, to come, not *before* I had fought her battle for her, but——”

“Captain Prior,” the doctor interrupted him, “this is most unwise. Let me *advise* you—not to-day.”

Your father took no notice of the interruption, except to stop speaking for the moment; but he continued to hold me and look into my eyes in a manner by which I understood that he was asking me if I could bear good news—great—great news. As soon as I thought I dared risk hearing it, I laid my head on his shoulder, and answered,—

“Yes. I have prayed to Him who has mercy upon all ‘prisoners and captives’: do not fear to tell me if my prayers have been—have been—not in vain.”

Ah! I wonder even now I was not utterly overwhelmed with all he had to tell me;—that my heart did not break with the rush of tumultuous happiness that beat upon it so unexpectedly. As I listened to him, or tried to listen, it was without the possibility of any exact understanding of the meaning of the details he related, but with an ever-increasing sense of a joy so full and perfect as to become at last almost suffocating.



At a later day, in a calmer state, he repeated all to me—how, instantly on his arrival, he had obtained an authoritative introduction to the governor of the prison, and had taken counsel with him and the doctor and the matron as to my state, and the propriety of discussing with me all that he had determined to do—and how he had then resolved, trusting to a natural instinct that seemed to defy nature itself, not to see me, or let me know of his arrival, till he had proved my innocence before the whole world.

He felt, he said, that if he saw me, and made me share his own hope and determination, and then, through the inexorable cruelty of circumstance, failed, my last state would be worse than the first; whereas, by reserving for me the knowledge of his absolute faith in my innocence, he reserved also a source of inestimable help and comfort, even if I should discover all he had vainly striven for.

In that spirit he went to work. He sought out and conversed with every person who had been, however slightly or remotely, connected with the affair. He engaged the service of the most eminent counsel, employed

detectives, and after all would have miserably failed, but for the intensity of purpose, and the almost holy devotion to the cause that possessed him.

From the first he had found it impossible to resist a conviction—which he could find no one to share, that the crime was absolutely confined to one of two persons—his own wife or the nurse. Many were willing to believe him right as regarding my innocence—none as regarded the nurse's guilt. She had borne herself, they said, so well through the affair, she had so obviously appeared to speak unwillingly against me, and she had a good character.

Hopeless of aid, he, half in despair, took the matter at last into his own hands. A few words had been dropped in an unguarded moment by the nurse's lover, which he thought might mean everything, but which all about him, after careful inquiries, were sure meant nothing. Accepting these as the last remaining chance of a happy solution, he also accepted them in a spirit of such determined conviction that his own faith alone carried him at once to the goal.

I tremble even now as I write the words, remembering

once more all that hung upon the moment. Shaping his course with the most admirable tact, skill, and courage, he suddenly confronted her, repeated the words I have spoken of to her in a voice of the deepest significance; she lost colour; her limbs trembled; she would have fallen, but that he caught her; and then so powerfully addressed at once her fears and her hopes, that before she had time to realise how little after all he might know, he wrung out of her a full confession, and gave her his promise that he would spare no exertion or influence at his command to obtain for her merciful consideration.

She would have retreated, he found, when she got to the police-station; but he had taken care to have credible witnesses within hearing, so the wretched creature yielded to her doom, and pleaded guilty. And your father more than fulfilled his promises to her. I have by me a touching letter, written by her years afterwards to me, that I shall seek, and send you with this.

Dear Will, I have little else to tell you.

The day, then, of your father's visit to me, was the day when all was so wonderfully accomplished, and I knowing

nothing of it, and when your father, the doctor, and the matron were full of doubt and anxiety as to how safely to tell me he had obtained permission to remove me from the prison at once. But I was of the doctor's opinion that it was safest for me to remain there one more night, and grow quietly accustomed to the thought of my liberty. Besides, it seemed to me that a heart so full of happiness *must* have *some* sweet or soothing influence on that gloomy place by merely resting there a few hours, and I could not put from me the childish idea that it was selfish to wish to hasten from it now that I was so rich in peace and liberty.

On the next day, before my departure, I was allowed to see and take leave of each of my fellow-prisoners, which I did with a pity and yearning that deprived me of the power to tell them half I wished of a Deliverer for *them* also, not so far distant as He then might seem. * * *

SEPTEMBER, 1874.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
STORY AND BIOGRAPHY	1	WORKS OF MR. TENNYSON	18
VAGUES AND TRAVEL	4	Poetry	19
ENCE	6	Fiction	22
SAYS AND LECTURES	10	CORNHILL LIBRARY OF FICTION	24
LITARY WORKS	11	THEOLOGICAL	25
DIA AND THE EAST	14	MISCELLANEOUS	29
OKS FOR THE YOUNG, &c.	15		

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